The Bat Creek Stone: The Little Stone With a Big Story

By

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ABSTRACT

This paper tells the story of the Bat Creek Stone and its dynamic role in science, Cherokee history and culture, and the exercise of tribal sovereignty. Starting with a historical overview of the BAE archaeological dig on Bat Creek, the thesis analyzes each theory on the stone's origins, with supporting archaeological, scientific, and historical evidence, and ends with a discussion of the Museum's role in understanding the stone' origin through further testing and exhibiting the stone. More than a simple chronology of an interesting and controversial object, this thesis, using the Bat Creek Stone, as a vehicle, analyzes such fundamental questions as to what is scientific proof, how does it relate to tribal histories, culture, and truths, and the means and processes by which tribes can reassert control over the telling of their own histories.

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Introduction

In the 1880's, the Smithsonian Institute's Bureau of American Ethnography (BAE) sent archaeologists, anthropologists, and ethnographers across the country to collect information about the indigenous peoples of America. By collecting histories, stories, and artifacts, the Bureau sought to document and preserve information concerning native cultures, customs, religions, and traditional practices through publications of Bureau reports. Included among the Bureau's several areas of study, was the investigation of the complex network of earthen mounds scattered across 22 eastern states. Numbering more than 2,000 mounds, the Bureau created the Division of Mound Exploration (DME) to prove that America's indigenous peoples had built these mounds as opposed to a "mystery race of mound builders" – the predominate theory since the early 1800's.

In 1889, while working a DME-sanctioned dig, John Emmert, a field assistant, claimed to have discovered a stone beneath a skull at the bottom of an undisturbed mound, along the banks of Bat Creek, a small tributary of the Little Tennessee River. Carved on one side of the stone was an inscription consisting of eight symbols which appeared to be characters from an unknown alphabet.

Figure 1: Bat Creek Stone

Although the Smithsonian had previously hired Emmert as an archaeologist, they had also fired him from past projects for a variety of reasons. Concerns about Emmert's professionalism eventually raised questions about the stone's validity and whether he may have planted this fascinating find to please the Smithsonian, thereby securing his continued employment. Nonetheless, when writing up the final report, published in the BAE *Twelfth Annual Report*, Cyrus Thomas, the DME project manager, concluded, "The engraved characters on it are beyond question letters of the Cherokee alphabet said to have been invented by George Guess (Sequoyah), a half-breed Cherokee, about 1821."

The stone's existence was virtually forgotten until 1971 when Cyrus Gordon, a linguist from New York University specializing in Middle Eastern languages specific to the Mediterranean Region, came across the stone while conducting research at the Smithsonian. In seeking proof that Jews, Phoenicians, and others crossed the Atlantic well before Columbus's voyage in the late 15th century, Gordon theorized that the stone's inscription was not Cherokee, but of a Canaanite or Paleo-Hebrew origin. Contending that Thomas had oriented the stone incorrectly as depicted in the BAE report, Gordon claimed that when inverted the characters matched a form of early Hebrew writing that translates as "for the Jews".

Proponents of the hypothesis that the Lost Tribes of Israel or another Mediterranean group had inhabited North America centuries before Columbus' arrival, seized on Gordon's claims as proof of this theory. For the next 45 years, both professional and recreational linguists and archaeologists, among others, have debated and used the Bat Creek Stone's origins to support their respective theories.

In 2008, Leslie Kalen, a member of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI), living in eastern Tennessee, invited Scott Wolter, a forensic geologist and host of the History Channel's

H2 TV show *America Unearthed*, to investigate the underground caves located on the Kalen farm. While at the Kalen farm, Wolter told Leslie of the Bat Creek Stone and the competing theories surrounding its origin. Leslie later discussed the story with her father, Donald Rose, a member of the Board of Directors for the Museum of the Cherokee Indian. Fascinated by the story, Don and other Board Members embarked on a quest to test the Stone and have it returned to the EBCI. For the next two years, several people, including EBCI community members, government officials, and museum staff members worked to obtain the Smithsonian's permission to have the stone tested at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville's McClung Museum, where the Bat Creek Stone had been held on long-term loan from the Smithsonian along with other associated artifacts from the Bat Creek dig.

In 2010, the groups successfully obtained Smithsonian permission to have Wolter, in the presence of University of Tennessee Archaeology Department and Museum of the Cherokee Indian staff, examine the stone under an electron microscope. An examination of the stone and each individual inscription found the characters were worn and free of recent geological material. The report further concluded that the stone's physical weathering was consistent with an environment of moist undisturbed packed clay, as described in the 1889 Bat Creek dig field notes, and that the stone was at least as old as the human remains and other items found in the mound.

Upon receiving the test results, the EBCI Tribal Council and the Principal Chief's Office formally requested that the Smithsonian return the stone to the tribe. In the fall of 2012, the Smithsonian approved the transfer of the stone under a loan agreement, renewable every two years, to the Museum of the Cherokee Indian, which serves as the EBCI's official repository for artifacts and historic documents. Despite the above testing, many questions remain, and mystery

and controversy surround the Bat Creek Stone. All that is certain is that this little stone continues to generate conflicting theories and debates among hobbyists, scientists, and indigenous peoples. The Bat Creek Stone serves as an excellent vehicle for examining broader and more fundamental questions of importance to science, indigenous knowledge, and tribal sovereignty in action. What happens when an object such as the Bat Creek Stone threatens the established systems not only of academia but also of tribal history and belief? Can an indigenous group such as the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, through its tribal museum, function as an unbiased narrator in telling the story and addressing the controversies that surround the stone?

This paper tells the story of the Bat Creek Stone and its dynamic role in science, Cherokee history and culture, and the exercise of tribal sovereignty. Starting with a historical overview of the BAE archaeological dig on Bat Creek, the thesis analyzes each theory on the stone's origins, with supporting archaeological, scientific, and historical evidence, and ends with a discussion of the Museum's role in understanding the stone' origin through further testing and exhibiting the stone. More than a simple chronology of an interesting and controversial object, this thesis, using the Bat Creek Stone, as a vehicle, analyzes such fundamental questions as to what is scientific proof, how does it relate to tribal histories, culture, and truths, and the means and processes by which tribes can reassert control over the telling of their own histories.

The paper will show how the Museum is seeking to test the stone and other artifacts believed to be from the same mound using state of the art methods to shine new light on this controversial matter and to finally answer the question of the origin of the Bat Creek Stone. The museum's view is that through continued historical and scientific analysis, many questions can be answered about the stone and its intriguing story can give people insights into how the fields of archaeology, history, and science work to provide new information about such pieces in

museum collections. More importantly, this story reveals how indigenous peoples and indigenous museums can use science in addition to their cultural knowledge to define and present their own histories and culture.

Chapter 1 – Cherokee Oral Tradition, the Power of Place, and the Bat Creek Stone

> *The Cherokee believed that all living things once lived in the sky above the Sky Arch. It was very crowded so they sent out Dayunisi, the Water Beetle, to dive down into the water to find land. Dayunisi dove down deep into the water until he came to the bottom where he found mud. He brought a piece of the mud back to the surface where it grew in all four directions making the earth. The animals were anxious to get down to earth so they sent out Great Buzzard to see if it was ready. He flew all over the surface but the land was still soft. When Great Buzzard got to Cherokee Country he was tired. His wings began to flap and strike the ground and where his wings hit, valleys appeared, and where his wings lifted up, mountains formed. That is why Cherokee Country is full of mountains to this day.*[1]

An underlying question raised in this thesis concerns the recognition of fact or truth, and accepted sources of evidence towards that end. The power of using tribal oral traditions is undeniable when attempting to gain an indigenous perspective on an issue such as tribal identity and a connection to their surrounding environment. However, for many scholars, tribal oral traditions used by themselves leave glaring gaps in what the physical evidence left by archaeological remains tells us. Established academic fields such as archaeology, history, and anthropology, while often biased, can, if used properly, be used to help bridge gaps that tribal oral traditions leave.

As stated, the purpose of this study is not to determine the truth of the Bat Creek Stone, it does seek to use these disciplines in partnership with tribal oral traditions to examine and illuminate the stories of the controversial Bat Creek Stone. This chapter will provide a general historical overview of the Cherokee presence in the region where the Bureau of Ethnology allegedly discovered the Bat Creek Stone. Next, the chapter will detail the history of the stone's finding, including the Bureau's sponsorship and role, the scientists involved in the dig, and an analysis of the archeological items found in three mounds along Bat Creek. Finally, the chapter

concludes with a short introduction to the main theories regarding the Stone's origins, which will be analyzed in detail in the next chapter.

Cherokee Origin Story, Oral Tradition, and the Power of Place

Many Cherokee believe the tribe has always lived in the Southern Appalachian region. Countless stories passed down through oral tradition tell of the origins of the earth, the creation of the Milky Way, the first man and woman, and how the Cherokee became hunters and farmers. James Mooney, an ethnographer with the Bureau of American Ethnology (BAE), collected dozens of Cherokee stories as part of his ethnographic study which was published in the 19th Annual Report for the BAE in 1900.

As many of these stories demonstrate, the Cherokees possess a strong sense of identity and connection with the earth's creation and their surrounding environment. Another important story is, *Kanati and Selu: The Origin of Game and Corn* describes the first Cherokee man and woman and defines their roles within traditional society. *Kanati*, or Lucky Hunter, was the first man who always brought back game from his daily hunts. Selu, or Corn, was the first Cherokee woman and always provided corn and beans for her family. In the story, before her death, she taught her children what to do in order for them to always have crops so that they would never go hungry.[2]

Both these stories are only two of many that have been shared for millennia. Stories such as these help shape a world view, they help to establish social order, and they help to solidify an identity. These stories are real. They are connected to real places in and around the Cherokee community today. Kanati and Selu lived at Shining Rock Wilderness, near present day Waynesville, NC, and the first Cherokee village was at the Kituwah Mound, near Bryson City, NC.[3] Many Cherokee consider the mother town of Kituwah as the birthplace of Cherokee

culture. In fact, the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians often refer to themselves as Kituwah. Mooney, in his 1898 annual report for the BAE, explains that Kituhwagi (People of Kituwah) was the name many informants used in referring to themselves and that it derived from "Kituhwa", the name of an ancient Cherokee settlement formerly above Bryson City, in Swain County, North Carolina.[4] It is noted in historical records as one of seven Cherokee mother towns as early as 1730.[5]

There are other tribal legends that also tell of the Cherokee people moving into the Southeast region in ancient times, after having been forced out of the North by their distant kinsman, the Iroquois. Linguists and historians have noted both similarities in their languages and a mutual disdain from both tribes as a strong possibility to this scenario.[6] Another similar legend describes the Cherokee coming to North America as part of an extremely long journey over land in a large group led by the Delaware people. The legend goes that during the journey the group split off just before or after crossing a great sea, with some people going North and some going South.[7] Through this story the Cherokee were said to believe that the Delaware were the grandfathers of all tribal peoples and that the Cherokee were the uncles to such tribes as the Creeks, Choctaws, and Chickasaws as well as being brothers to other tribes.[8] Regardless of how long the Cherokee people have been in the area, a powerful sense of tribal identity and an unyielding connection to the land, helped develop the Cherokee people into the most powerful tribe in the Southeast. Villages grew in the valleys of Western North Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia, and South Carolina along rivers such as the Little Tennessee, Tuckasegee, Nantahala, French Broad, and many others. Hunting and trade routes spread from this cultural epicenter ultimately expanding Cherokee influence, and allowing their borrowing from other tribes. Over time, the larger town, such as Kituwah, Nikwasi, Chotah, and others, grew around centrally

constructed earthen mounds, which served as the focus for spiritual and political life. Here were located living quarters for village leaders, large council houses, and temples where elaborate ceremonies embodied Cherokee spirituality. While many such mounds exist to the present day, questions remain regarding these mounds' creation, uses, and importance.

Archaeological Evidence of a Cherokee Presence in the Southeast

Both western science and tribal traditions indicate that the, Cherokee people inhabited areas in seven states, including the Carolinas, Tennessee, Georgia, Kentucky, and the Virginias. Colonial and federal Indian policies whittled away, ancestral tribal lands, ultimately leading to the forced removal of the Cherokee, in 1838, to the Indian Territory in present day Oklahoma. Today's Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI), which reside on 56,000 acres primarily on the Qualla Boundary and outlying parcels of tribal property in the western most counties of North Carolina, among the Great Smokey Mountains, are the descendants of those Cherokees who refused to move to Oklahoma. As discussed above, many Cherokee stories refer to the Smokey Mountain region as the location of the tribe's birth. Other stories refer to passage over a sea and a period of long migration – stories, which appear to reflect the belief held by many archeologists and geneticists that the ancestors of the indigenous peoples of the Western Hemisphere arrived primarily over the land bridge between Asia and North American beginning 70,000 years ago during the last glaciation. .[9] Traveling in a southeasterly direction, the first nomadic hunters arrived in the Southeast region approximately 14,000 years ago.

Paleo Period (ca. 12,000 B.C.E.-8,000 B.C.E.)

The actual date of Cherokee people occupying what is today the Southeastern United States is debated amongst archaeologists, anthropologists, and tribal historians. Many scholars believe the first indigenous peoples moved into the region approximately 12,000 B.C. when the

glaciers from the last ice age were receding north and modern floodplains were being created all throughout the Southeast.[10] These early inhabitants lived in very small groups, while hunting migrating animals such as mastodon and eventually buffalo.[11]

Archaeological findings from this period are somewhat rare due to the nomadic life-style of these early groups, but archeologists have discovered fluted points in the Clovis and Folsom style left by these early Paleo people in Eastern Tennessee and Western North Carolina. Numerous examples of the Clovis style point have been found along the Appalachian Summit region of East Tennessee.[12] In the Tennessee River Valley alone, over 60 sites containing hundreds of these points along with scrappers, knives, and other early tools dating back over 9,000 years. [13]

Archaic Period (ca. 8000 B.C.E.-1000 B.C.E.)

Around 8,000 B.C.E., climactic changes caused a major environmental shift in the Appalachian Summit of the Southeast region. Increasing temperatures melted mountain glaciers causing erosion and runoff that eventually formed an extensive network of valleys where streams and rivers provided a new setting for life to thrive.[14] As temperatures warmed, groups that had previously wintered in the region's caves, moved down into the river valleys to live. As family groups joined, these camps grew, spreading for several hundred feet along the crests of newly formed terraces made of fertile river sediment.[15] Lacking evidence of structural postholes or charred remains for living structures, anthropologists speculate that the peoples of the early Archaic Period lived in crude semi-temporary shelters.

Increased temperatures also caused a change in the native wildlife of the region. The larger species such as mastodon and saber-toothed tigers had disappeared, leaving deer, elk, fox, opossum, squirrel, turkey, and beaver as the new game. The people perfected the art of fishing,

catching vast quantities of catfish and trout, along with fresh water muscles, and gathered and preserved a vast array of berries, roots, tubers, and bark to supplement their diet.[16]

The archaeological record of the Appalachian Summit demonstrate that the slowly growing population produced a wide variety of ever evolving projectile points, grooved axes, mortars, hammer stones, and soap stone vessels.[17] These artifacts along with plant and animal remains, and burials also tell the story of an ever developing culture growing in sophistication and inherently connected to its environment. Over the next 7,000 years, these peoples experienced a cultural explosion, evolving into what the archaeologists call the Woodland and eventually the Mississippian periods.

Woodland Period (ca. 1000 B.C.E.-A.D. 1000)

By this time of the Woodland period, vast forests of coniferous and hardwood trees covered the Southeastern region and the Appalachian Summit, and the large multi-family camp sites that had dotted the landscaped in the Archaic period, had grown into permanent towns. Within these growing towns, a developing culture had become diversified with well-established gender roles, complex ceremonies, wide-ranging trade routes with other groups, and the domestication of plants and animals.[18] The more stationary living arrangement allowed pottery, weaving, and basketry to flourish and develop through the sharing among groups of new techniques and handling of materials.

Particularly important during this period in the Appalachian Summit area, were evolutions in pottery. The "New World's" earliest documented pottery dates back at least 5,000 years from Central America.[19] The earliest examples of pottery in the Southeast go back approximately 3,500 years.[20] Pottery, arguably, serves as the best archaeological tool for identifying cultural characteristics and as a chronological marker for scholars. Early potters used

crushed quartz before switching to sand and grit tempering methods all while constructing pots with the coil method.[21] Early pottery designs included cord and fabric impressed designs, as well as, simple stamped patterns applied by slapping the wet clay with a carved out wooden paddle before firing. This style of stamping is believed to arrive in the Appalachian Summit as part of a northward spread of trade and cultural interaction out of Georgia and Alabama.[22] Over the next 3,000 years, pottery would evolve and serve as a cultural marker for the increased sophistication and interaction of every indigenous group of the region.

The construction of burial mounds is the second defining cultural component of the Woodland period. It is believed that the mounds served as the hub for all political, social, and religious activity for the developing towns. The Hopewell Culture of the Ohio Valley was the first culture to construct mounds, which developed into an elaborate system of burial mounds, with the largest more than 500 feet in length and 20 feet in height. From the Ohio Valley, mound building spread along the waterways throughout the Southeast region

Experts have identified more than 70 mounds in the Little Tennessee River Valley alone, dating to the middle to late Woodland period.[23] These mounds, in comparison to the Hopewell Mounds, were less elaborate and smaller, seldom exceeding fifty feet in diameter and ten feet in height, with some containing more than one hundred graves.[24] The Hopewellian influence was far reaching. They had extensive trade routes established where these people collected conch shells from the Gulf states, pearls from a variety of rivers, obsidian from the Rockies, mica from the Appalachians, copper from the Great Lakes region, and many other materials from even as far away as Central America.[25] This Central American trade connection is believed to be the origin of the acquisition of corn for the peoples of the southeast during the Woodland Period,

which would eventually develop into the defining component that would take their cultures to new heights and into what scholars call the Mississippian Period.

Mississippian Period (ca. A.D. 1000-1500)

The development of corn as sustainable agriculture highlighted the late Woodland period. Although the first evidence of cultivated corn in the Southeastern region dates to 300 B.C.E., it was another 1200 years before it became a major part of the Native diet.[26] With the establishment of a sustainable agricultural crop, fertile river bottoms became prized locations for establishing larger villages with some exploding over time into powerful chiefdoms.[27] At its peak, The Mississippian period is defined by the following:

1. construction of earthen platform mounds, where temples, elite residences, and council buildings were placed
2. open plazas surrounding the mounds
3. rapid population growth along with stable residences
4. organized chiefdoms
5. increased sense of territory and war
6. elaborate and well developed religious ceremonies
7. dependence on new strains of corn
8. changes in pottery styles[28]

By A.D. 1000, organized villages, maize agriculture, and stratified social structures had appeared in eastern Tennessee and along the western fringes of the Appalachian Summit.[29] For the next 500 years powerful chiefdoms would grow, clash, trade, and coexist throughout the region. During these five centuries, what is known today as the Cherokee culture evolved and

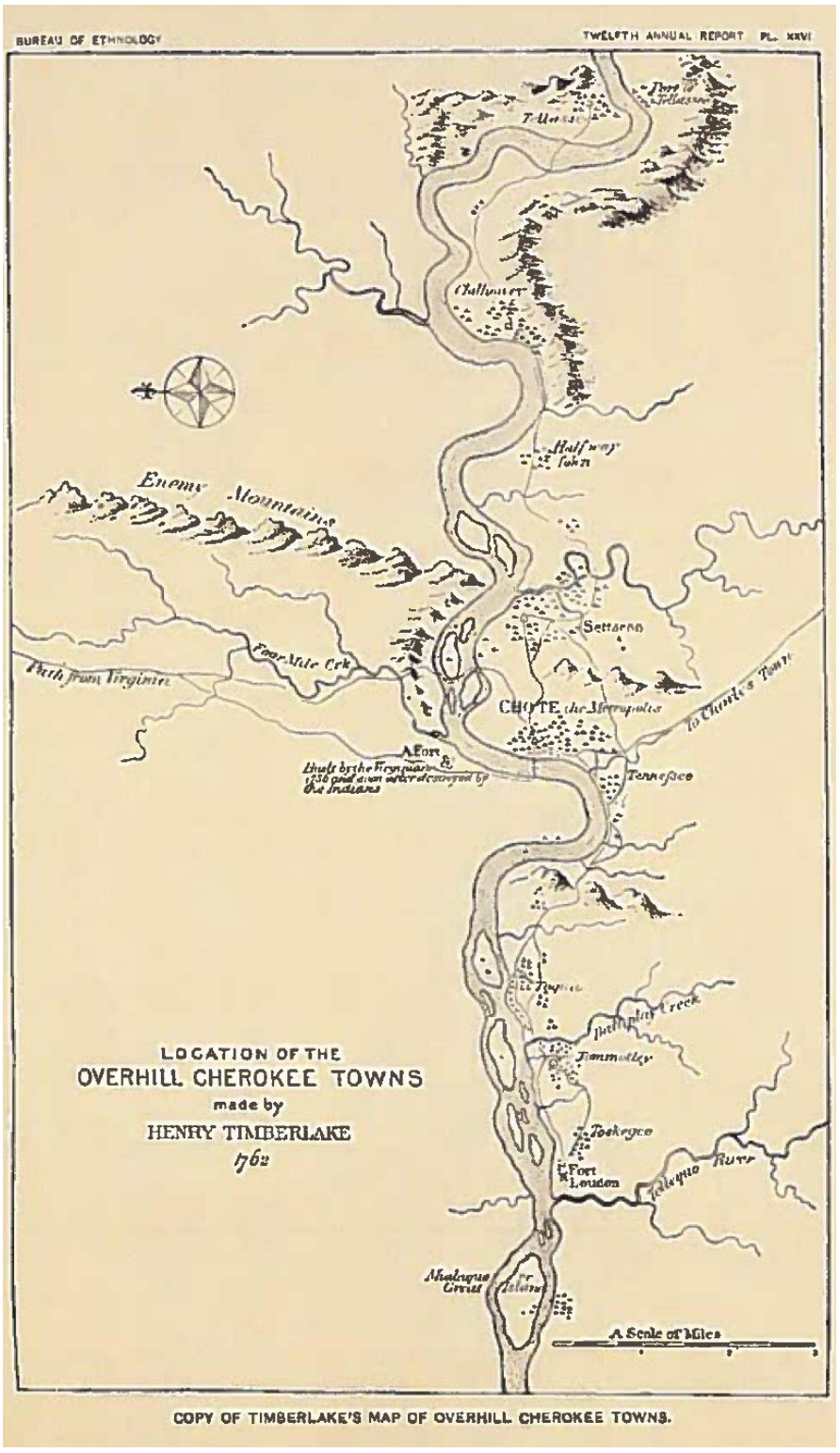
developed, creating a strong alliance of powerful autonomous villages strengthened through a clan based kinship system that guided everyday life including gender roles and punishing crimes.[30] With their vast network of territory, trading partners, and resources, the powerful Cherokees dominated the tribes of the Southeast. Soon, they would find themselves both sought out by and in conflict with new groups moving into the area from a distant land across the ocean.

Historic Period (after A.D. 1500)

In 1539, the Spanish explorer and conquistador, Hernando de Soto, became the first European explorer to travel through Cherokee territory, visiting Kituwah and Nikwasi in southwestern North Carolina.[31] De Soto is the first known European to have recorded his interaction with an indigenous group; he called the "Achelaque",[32] a name given to him by his Creek guides derived from the Muscogee *tciloki*, meaning people who speak a different language.[33]

Twenty-five years later, another Spanish explorer, Juan Pardo, traveled a similar route into present-day Tennessee. For more than one hundred years, the Spanish explorers, traveled throughout Cherokee country, destroying towns and villages, enslaving villagers, sacking temples, and confiscating native food stores.[34] By the 1650s, the Cherokee population had been devastated and would only number to 22,000.[35] Starvation, murder, and diseases brought by the Europeans into Cherokee country had turned once awe inspiring towns into mere shadows of their former glory.

In 1673, the first English traders had appeared, negotiating agreements that were perceived as extremely lucrative for all parties in the lower and middle Cherokee towns in western North Carolina and upstate South Carolina. The British were interested in furs from the vast Cherokee territory and the Cherokee saw an opportunity to establish trade for European



COPY OF TIMBERLAKE'S MAP OF OVERHILL CHEROKEE TOWNS.

Figure 2: Timberlake's Map of Little Tennessee River and Cherokee Towns[36]

items such as cloth, metal tools, and weapons. By the 1680's the British had made their way into eastern Tennessee, where they discovered an established network of Cherokee towns down the Little Tennessee River Valley and along its tributaries. Twenty years later, the British had negotiated with the Cherokee to allow a British trader to reside with them.[37] In 1761, British Officer Henry Timberlake, in an effort to win peace with the Cherokee and secure a military alliance against the rebellious colonists, spent four months traveling through Cherokee territory. Upon his return, he wrote his *Memoirs* in which he included *A Draught of the Cherokee Country*, a map showing the location of several towns, including Chota, Toqua, Tomotley, Tuskegee, and Mialoquo, among others.[38]

Over the next 100 plus years, the Cherokee people would feel the effects of trade, assimilation, acculturation, and political turmoil on an unprecedented scale. The Cherokee saw their traditional lands ceded away first to colonial governments and ultimately to the United States government. Indian Removal was a federal policy almost from the outset of the first American government. Thomas Jefferson was the first President to strongly encourage the removal of the eastern tribes, an idea growing in intensity under the Monroe administration and coming to reality under Andrew Jackson.[39] The Cherokee, like many others Indian nations, after having their land base slowly taken, their social structures undermined and thrown into turmoil, and their spirituality replaced by European philosophies, lost the power remain in their homes. The vast majority were removed to the Indian Territory in what is today Oklahoma. The government eventually recognized the descendants of a small group that avoided removal by hiding in the mountains of western North Carolina as the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians.

Federal Archaeology and the Bureau of American Ethnology

Since their first contact with the southeastern tribes, European explorers and colonizers have put forth a number of theories concerning the tribes' origins and the builders of the ancient earthworks. Beginning in the 18th and for most of the 19th centuries, most whites believed that a "race of Mound Builders", and not the indigenous tribes, had constructed the mounds and other earthworks.[40] The ancestors of the existing tribes, according to proponents of the "Mound Builder" theory, did not possess the technical sophistication to construct earthworks of such magnitude. Rather, another group, such as the Vikings, Romans, Phoenicians, or most popular, the Canaanites and the Lost Tribes of Israel, built the mounds, only to be driven out by the savage ancestors of the current indigenous inhabitants.[41]

As the chaos of Civil War receded, government officials and hobbyists focused their attention on the country's tribal peoples. There was a desire of many to collect artifacts and relics from Native groups, and attempt to solve several "mysteries" about tribes that had persisted since Europeans first made contact in the 15th century. Questions about the origin of indigenous peoples, their religious customs, their daily lives, warfare, and many others spurred several organizations and individuals to head out across the country to answer these questions. The answers to these questions would be exhibited in museums that were springing up all over the country. Museums across the country were eager to acquire pipes, jewelry, points, and any other items connected with tribal people.

In 1879, Congress established the Bureau of American Ethnology (BAE) to transfer archives, records, and materials relating to the indigenous groups of North America from the Department of Interior, where they were held, to the newly formed Smithsonian Institution.[42] Founding Director, Major John Wesley Powell, had a larger mission in mind for the BAE.

Rather than engaging in simple clerical duties, Powell's objective was to send teams of archaeologists, anthropologists, and ethnographers across the country to collect information about the indigenous peoples of America. By collecting histories, stories, and artifacts, the Bureau sought to document and preserve information concerning native cultures, customs, religions, and traditional practices through publications of Bureau reports.

To accomplish this, Powell divided the BAE into three areas of primary focus: mound and earthwork surveys; ethnographic collections; and serving as repository for information collected by various US geological surveys.[43] Several of the country's earliest archaeologists and anthologists, including James Mooney, Frank Cushing, and John Hewitt comprised the BAE's first staff. Later famous BAE collaborators included the noted linguists John Peabody Harrington and William Strutevant, sociologist Franz Boas, and famed anthropologist Cyrus Thomas.[44]

BAE's Division of Mound Exploration

One of the most hotly debated theories discussed at the time of the BAE's founding concerned the origin of indigenous peoples and which groups were responsible for constructing the complex system of mounds and earthworks, primarily located in the eastern part of the United States. As discussed, the two major sides of the "mounds dispute" included those scholars, such as Major Powell, who argued that the ancestors of the present day tribal group were responsible for the complex system of mounds and earthworks. On the opposing side, were those who argued that these groups did not possess the required technical sophistication and that a completely separate group of "Mound Builders" were responsible for their existence. It is due to Powell's determination to prove the mounds were directly related to present day tribal groups, that Powell created as one of the BAE's three main sections, the Division of Mound Exploration.

Powell appointed Cyrus Thomas as Director of the Mound Survey Project, a long-time friend and expert on mound archaeology. To conduct the survey, Thomas sent field assistants to conduct digs at some 2,000 earthen mounds across 22 eastern states, and report their findings to him at the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C.

These field assistants uncovered close to 50,000 artifacts and thousands of human remains over the course of the study. Thomas compiled all the field notes from the various digs and published the findings in the BAE's 12th Annual Report. Based on the evidence, Thomas determined, "The links directly connecting the Indians and mound-builders are so numerous and well established that archaeologists are justified in accepting the theory that they are one and the same people."[45] Although Thomas had previously published this conclusion, the vast majority of scholars considered the 12th Annual BAE Report as the last word in the controversy over the origin of the Mound Builders. Little did anyone guess that an item found in a dig from a remote section of East Tennessee decades later, would revive the Mound Builder debate.

The BAE Mound Survey in East Tennessee

While the total scope of the BAE Mound Survey spanned 22 states, primary attention focused on East Tennessee and the Appalachian Summit. Between 1885 and 1889, assistants supervised by Field Assistant John Emmert, investigated 53 mounds in the region.[46] Noting the research value of these East Tennessee mounds, Cyrus Thomas wrote, "The valley of the Little Tennessee from where it leaves the Smokey Mountains, which form the boundary between North Carolina and Tennessee, to where it joins the Tennessee River in Loudon County, is undoubtedly the most interesting archaeological section in the entire Appalachian district.[47] The area Thomas described lay in the heart of Cherokee territory.

The Bat Creek Dig

In 1885, Emmert worked his way down the Little Tennessee River and its tributaries for the better part of two years, all the while, faithfully reporting to Thomas on his progress or reason for delays. After being temporarily dismissed in 1887, officially due to lack of funds but rumored for Emmert's inability to stay sober and questionable field techniques, he was rehired in 1889 as the survey along the Little Tennessee River continued, Emmert and his assistants made their way to the mouth of Bat Creek where they were told of three mounds located on a farm owned by the Tipton family.[48] When the field team arrived, they discovered a large mound directly where Bat Creek ran into the Little Tennessee River. On the opposite or west side of the creek they found two smaller mounds located on a terrace above the valley.[49] Directly across from Mound 1, on the east side of the Little Tennessee, the team located an ancient Cherokee village site, which they described as containing very dark soil and numerous broken pottery, flint chips, and other evidence of occupation.[50] The three mounds of the Bat Creek Dig were distinctly different from each other and contained a wide-ranging spectrum of items.

Mound 1, substantially larger than the other two, measured 108 feet in diameter and 8 feet in height, with the top portion composed entirely of the very dark soil similar to the soil of the village site on the adjacent bank, and containing a large number of shells, which at some points gave the appearance of a shell heap.[51] Half way down the mound was constructed with yellow sand with baked clay hearths throughout a central area at varying depths. Besides the shells, the only other items worth reporting, were a few charred animal bones.

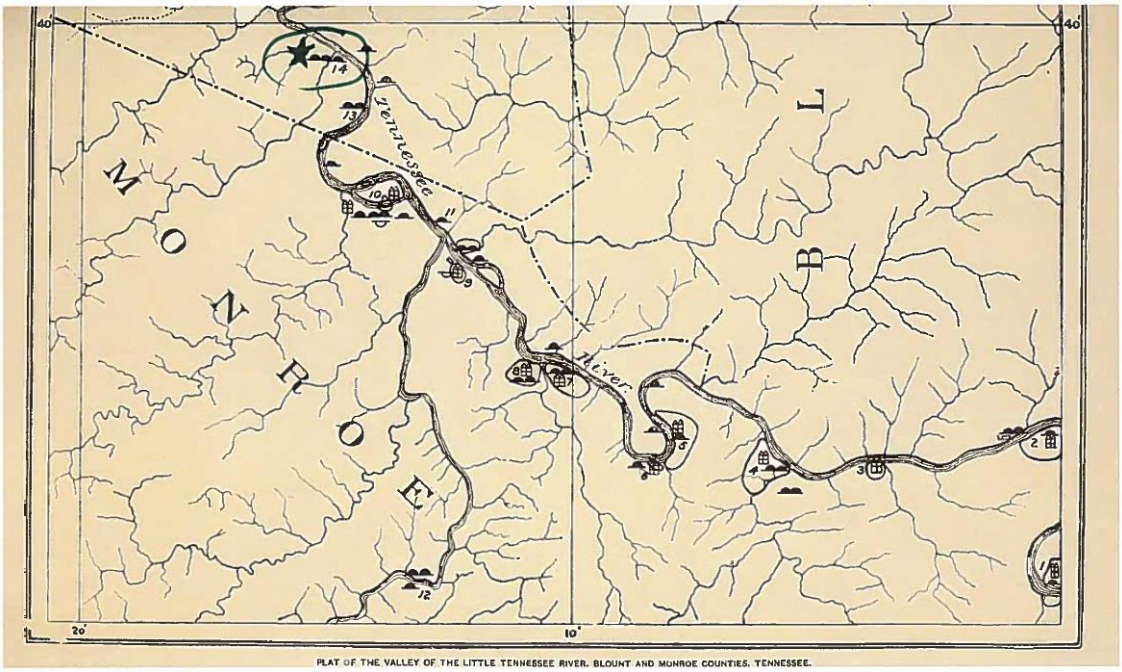


Figure 3: BAE Map of mounds along Little Tennessee River. #14 designates the Bat Creek Mounds.[52]

Mound 2 was progressively smaller, measuring 44 feet in diameter and 10 feet high, on which stood a black oak tree measuring a few feet in diameter. Constructed differently from Mound 1, the mound was composed of packed red clay and contained the skeleton of an adult in a horizontal position, with the head pointing east and the arms to the side.[53] Buried with the skeleton were two metal buckles near the chest with a small piece of leather attached, and evidence of buckskins leggings and metal buttons around the leg bones. The field notes described the portion of earth directly around the skeleton as dark greenish in color.[54] It is important to note, that Thomas reported it was impossible to discern if the burial was intrusive to the original mound. On the one hand, the mound's consistent composition, save for the area around the burial and the size of the tree growing above the mound, argues against an intrusive burial.[55] On the other hand, the buckles and buckskin leggings clearly indicate activity that is more recent after the mound's original construction.

Directly one foot below the skeleton, the BAE field assistants discovered a stone vault, in which they found seven skeletons arranged in a variety of ways and adorned with beads depicting importance and social status. Below these organized burials, lay nine more skeletons that were, "much decayed, and lying in all directions, seemingly thrown in without any care."[56]

Mound 3, the smallest of the three Bat Creek mounds, measured only 28 feet in diameter and 5 feet in height, but would produce the jewel of the entire dig – at least initially in the eyes of John Emmert and much later for many proponents of the Mound Builder theory. Similar to Mound 2, large trees stood on the mound. Mr. Tipton, the land's owner, stated that forty years previously, he had cut down the cluster of trees and grape vines covering the mound.[57] The BAE report also mentions a rotten stump with roots running to the mound's base and deep running roots down to the base of the mound where nine skeletons were discovered.

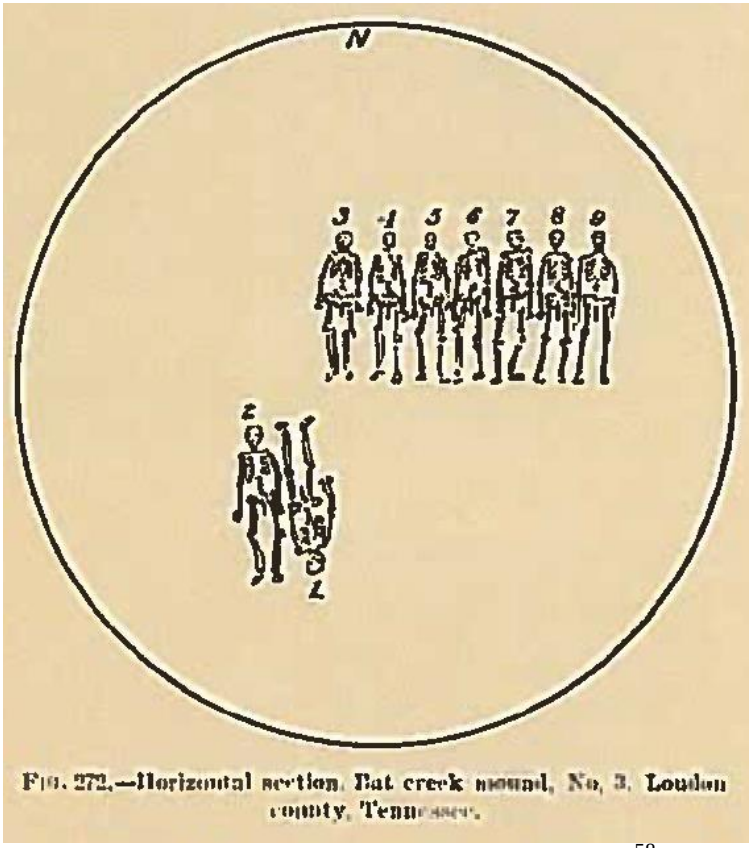


Figure 4: Sketch of Mound 3 at Bat Creek[58]

Composed consistently of red clay except for around the burials, this lack of stratification and the presence of large growth trees indicate the mound's extreme age and without intrusive activity after the original construction. The field team found little to report until they reached the mound's base. There, nine skeletons were found laying on the original surface of the ground surrounded by dark colored earth consistent with that of the adjacent village site.[59] All the skeletons were lying horizontal with one skeleton oriented with their head to the south (designated No. 1 in the BAE Report) and the other eight skeletons oriented with their heads pointing north.

In a March 7th 1889 letter to Cyrus Thomas, Emmert describes the items found with skeleton No. 1 from Mound 3:

> *Immediately under the skull and jaw bones of skeleton No. 1, I found two copper bracelets, an engraved stone, a small drilled fossil stone, a copper bead, a bone instrument, and some small pieces of polished wood. The ground about the skeleton was wet and muddy...the engraved stone was lying back of the skull. I punched it on the rough side with my steel rod in probing before I came to the skeletons. The other side of the stone is exactly as it was taken from the skeleton at the bottom of the mound about five feet deep.*[60]

Emmert had first mentioned the stone's discovery in a letter to Thomas on February 15, 1889, when Emmert describes finding two interesting mounds, one of which contained the nine skeletons mentioned above. He further explained that, "In the mound with nine in it I found a large pair of copper bracelets and a polished stone with letters or characters cut on it unlike anything I have ever seen before."[61] Interested, Thomas responded that Emmert should continue working and send him more information on the engraved stone. About a week later Emmert again wrote Thomas, "I wrote you several days ago telling you of my success in the Tipton Mounds in which I found the bracelets, buckles, buckskin, and engraved stone…There is considerable excitement here about the stone with letters on it that came out of the Tipton

Mound…"[62] In his reply, Thomas requested that Emmert send him a photograph of the engraved stone. Days later, Emmert responded, "…it is impossible to get a photograph of the stone here. I will send you a copy of it as near as I can draw it. I think it is a good idea to look into everything near here that we might find something else like the stone, or that might have some connection with it."[63] Thomas, pleased with the dig's progress, instructed Emmert, as he had on numerous other Mound Survey digs, to package the collected specimens and send them to the Smithsonian. At the end of Emmert's March 7th letter, quoted above, Emmert writes, "I have packed the specimens carefully and put the engraved stone in a box separate as you directed…"[64]

Following the initial excitement generated by the Bat Creek stone, Emmert moved to the next farm and continued working for a few more months. In Washington, Cyrus Thomas compiled his Mound Survey Report based on the field notes sent by his assistants. Thomas briefly mentioned the engraved stone in the BAE 12th Annual Report, including the stone's picture, as shown above, and describing it as, "The engraved characters on it are beyond question, letters of the Cherokee alphabet said to have been invented by George Guess (or Sequoyah), a half breed Cherokee, about 1821.[65] For most academics, the comprehensive BAE Mound Survey reported in the Bureau's 12th Annual Report in 1894, proved that the ancestors of current tribes, and not a mystery race of Mound Builders, had constructed the numerous mounds in the Eastern half of the United States. Thomas specifically included the Appalachian Summit region, writing, "…the proof is apparently conclusive that the Cherokee were mound builders and to them are to be attributed most of the mounds of Eastern Tennessee and Western North Carolina."[66] The BAE Mound Survey Report appeared to settle the debate over the origins of the Mound Builders. The finds from Bat Creek, including the stone, seemingly proved the connection between the mounds and the historic tribes. For decades, the origins debate lay

dormant, until new questions surfaced about the Bat Creek Stone. What was the Bat Creek Stone? Who had made it? Was it of Cherokee origin or evidence of the presence of a Paleo-Hebraic group? Was the writing in Masonic script, proving the theory that the Knights Templar had found their way to North America? Or was the stone a fake; evidence of a massive fraud perpetrated by a fraudulent archeologist eager for fame and a position? Archaeologists, historians, linguists, and scientists have pondered all these theories with a spectrum of differing and often polarizing conclusions. The following chapter analyzes each of the major theories put forth to explain the mysteries of the Bat Creek Stone.

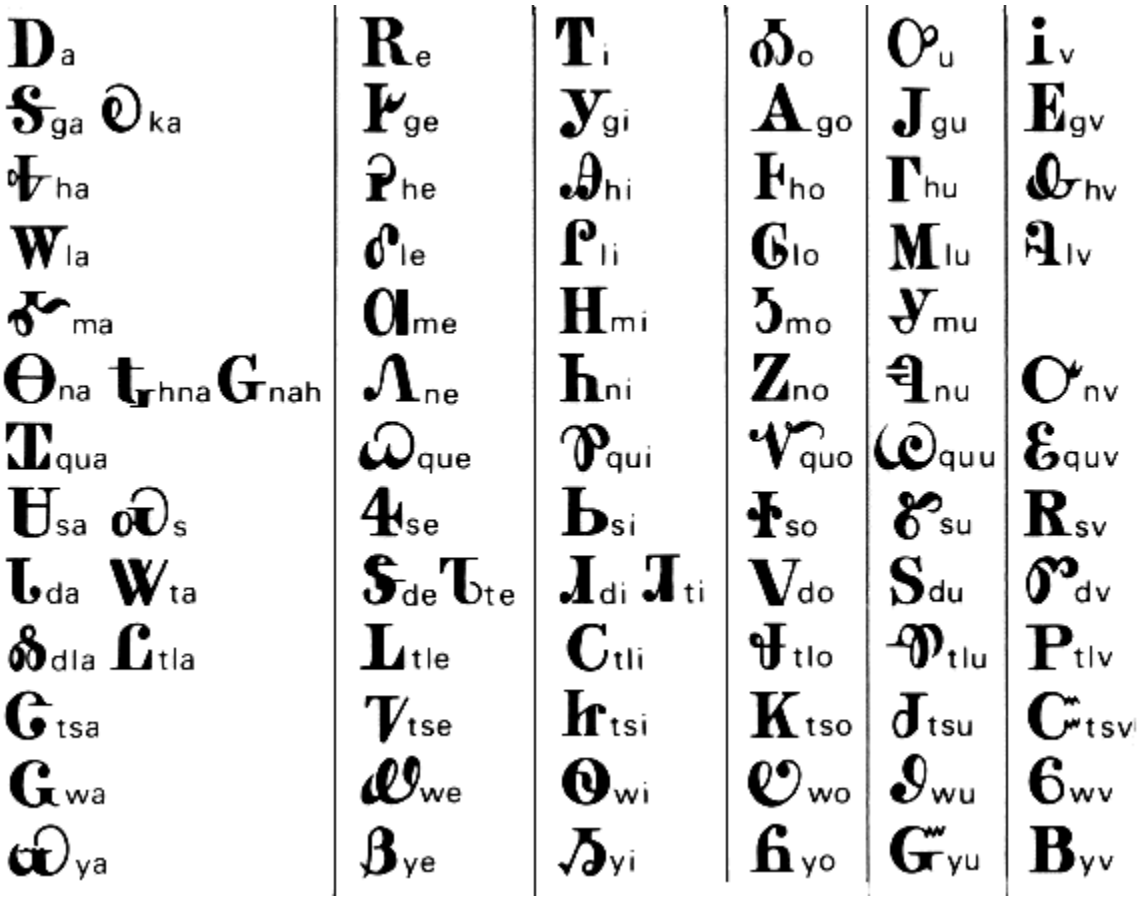
Chapter 2 - The Many Theories Surrounding the Bat Creek Stone

The previous section of the paper serves to give archaeological and historical context to the following description of the many theories surrounding the Bat Creek Stone. In this section, evidence will be shown in support and in rebuttal of each theory in relation to the Stone. It is worth noting that the purpose of this paper is not to prove or disprove a respective theory about the Bat Creek Stone, but to provide a holistic description of each theory in order to show the complex story that the Museum of the Cherokee Indian is faced with telling.

Is the inscription on the Stone Cherokee? Is the inscription from Hebrew origin? Is the stone the result of a farce created for personal gain or public humiliation? Evidence will be given for and against each of these beliefs. Archeologists, historians, linguists, and scientists have investigated all these theories with a spectrum of differing and often polarizing conclusions. We will learn what is known about each theory and explore the holes remaining for those seeking to solidify their claims about the origin of the Bat Creek Stone inscription.

The Cherokee Theory

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Bat Creek Stone was discovered in a mound adjacent to a tributary of the Little Tennessee River in what was once the heart of traditional Cherokee territory. It was reportedly discovered with other items that had been and would continue to be found in numerous other mounds and burials throughout the Appalachian Summit. It is primarily for these reasons that Cyrus Thomas of the BAE concluded in the 12th Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology that, "The engraved characters on the stone are beyond question letters of the Cherokee alphabet said to have been invented by George Guess (or Sequoyah), a half-breed Cherokee, about 1821."[67]



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It is important to note here that this particular conclusion regarding the inscription being Cherokee syllabary was made by Thomas as further proof that the mounds in the area of investigation were built by the Cherokees and not by a mystery race of mound-builders. Keeping in mind that the purpose of the BAE Mound Survey was to discover in fact who built the mounds, in Thomas's mind there was never any discussion of any other possible origin to the inscription. In fact the Bat Creek inscription was never referenced again by Thomas other than the short excerpt mentioned above. It was almost as if it was lost in the overwhelming examples of other Indigenous artifacts used to prove the creators of the mounds for the conclusion of the Mound Survey.

In the Findings and Conclusion section of the BAE 12th Annual Report, Thomas has an entire section discussing inscribed stones. In the section he is referencing several examples from various other archaeological digs and reported findings from around the country that are said to be proof that the mounds were in fact built by a more advanced race than the Indigenous groups of North America. He mentions items such as the Grave Creek Tablet, which after further study revealed that the inscription contained characters from half a dozen different alphabets.[69] Thomas goes on to mention other examples of plated archaeological finds from other digs that contained inscriptions from various alphabets connected to the old world and pointed out their deficiencies that were accepted to the established and reputable scholars of the era as forgeries.

Thomas concludes his discussion on "Engraved Tablets" by discussing their lack of instances in proportion of such artifacts with other associated artifacts such as points, pottery, shell, etc. While all throughout the mound survey there were tens of thousands of artifacts found that were attributed to various Native groups in respect to their location in context of the digs being conducted. Thomas writes, "Unless there should be corroboratory proof to connect them with the mound-builders, and other evidence indicating a corresponding advance in art, these anomalous waifs, such as the tablets with letters engraved upon them, even if genuine, are of no value in answering the question of who built the mounds. The whole of the testimony furnished by an examination of these ancient works …must be taken into consideration."[70]

There is also quite a large amount of historic research used to prove that the mounds and ultimately the items contained within them were in fact built by the ancestors of Native groups. Thomas cites William Bartram's notes of his journey through Creek and Cherokee territories in 1773. Bartram is credited with some of the earliest and well detailed notes describing early interpretations of Native peoples in the Southeast. Bartram describes visiting an Overhill Town,

called Sticoe. He wrote, "The council house is a large rotunda, capable of accommodating several hundred people. It stands on the top of an ancient artificial mount of earth, of about 20 feet perpendicular…"[71] Bartram goes on to describe visiting several other towns and ancient village sites that contained mounds and some of which had been documented by local European settlements for 250 years with the earliest European accounts matching and describing what Bartram had said.[72] Thomas goes on to cite several other historical accounts from various expeditions and studies from the decades and even centuries leading up to his report.[73]

John Emmert, the discoverer of the Bat Creek Stone, who served as Thomas's main field agent in the Appalachian Summit region during the course of the BAE Mound Survey was also published in an early anthropology journal given historical credence to the Cherokee as being mound builders and the long ancient occupiers of the very region of the Bat Creek dig. Emmert describes a cemetery and adjacent village site in McMinn County, Tennessee where bodies were oriented inside of mounds in the same fashion as the Tipton Mounds on Bat Creek.[74] The article concludes with a description of a historical account of a camp close to the mound site where Emmert was working that served as a holding area for Cherokees where they were kept for months before their removal from East Tennessee.[75]

The initial designation of the inscription on the Bat Creek Stone being Cherokee speaks to the premise of the BAE Mound Survey and the overall context of the dig itself. The Bat Creek site was in the heart of Cherokee territory. The mounds contained human remains and similar artifacts that had been discovered in abundance from other known Cherokee sites. Both Cyrus Thomas and John Emmert used comprehensive historical accounts to tie the mounds to Cherokee towns and village sites as well. In addition to all these reasons to support the Cherokee theory for the inscription, the preconceived notions and biases of the BAE Mound Survey and its

supporters must be factored into the equation. Thomas launched the Mound Survey in large part to disprove the long standing theory of the Mound Builders. Was the inscription on the stone properly vetted with the proper methods of the time to ensure authenticity as being Cherokee? There is no mention of the stone in any other of Cyrus Thomas's many writings. It is simply declared Cherokee and covered up by a mountain of further evidence to show the mounds were in fact authored by Native peoples.

Others after the fact have come to the conclusion that the inscription is Cherokee as well. In a 1994 article, Marshall McKusick outlines an argument that the inscription closely resembles a shorthand form of Sequoyah's syllabary. He states, "One can judge some striking parallels between most Bat Creek symbols and one syllabary variant in use during the 1820's…"[76] McKusick goes on to describe a modified form of syllabary that was developed in 1827 that he calls a typeset version which shifted to consonant-vowels and eliminated consonants following vowels.[77] He then goes on to argue several examples between the symbols on the inscription and the Cherokee syllabary. McKusick makes what some would argue a valid point with the conclusion that, "If we suppose the Bat Creek Stone is authentic and dates from the 1820's, the native Cherokee burial was interred only 60-70 years at the time of the excavation in 1889. Such a recent burial explains the otherwise surprising survival of wooden earspools and bark not found with older mound burials."[78] This conclusion however contradicts Emmert's belief that the burials were obtrusive to the original construction of the mound which he believed was well before the early 19th century.

Arguments Against the Cherokee Theory

At the time of the dig in 1889, Carbon Dating was not available to archaeologists as a means of dating artifacts they uncovered. The inscription was simply labeled Cherokee and said

to consist of characters from the writing system developed by Sequoyah around 1820. Almost a century after the discovery of the stone, a radiocarbon test was conducted on a small wood sample that came from the ear spools found with the same grave as the Bat Creek Stone. The test conducted by Beta Analytic Inc., determined the calibrated calendar range of the material to be 32 A.D.-769-A.D.[79]

Presuming that this report is accurate and the ear spools were discovered as they were reported from the field notes in 1889, the lab results would indicate that the Bat Creek Stone and the associated artifacts to include the human remains were buried together in an undisturbed grave at least 1,000 years before Sequoyah developed the Cherokee syllabary. In addition to the lab results that predate Sequoyah's syllabary, is the simple fact that none of the characters closely resemble those of the Cherokee writing system. The Eastern Band was consulted in 2010 and 2011 about the possibility of the inscription being Cherokee. The inscription was presented to the Cherokee Language Speakers Consortium, which is comprised of tribal elders that are fluent speakers and writers in the Cherokee language. There general consensus was that the inscription was not Cherokee. Their stance on the idea that the inscription is Cherokee is contained in the exhibit about the Bat Creek Stone in the Museum of the Cherokee Indian and states, "Today's Cherokee elders, the Tribal Historic Preservation Office, and the EBCI Cultural Resource Office do not believe the inscription is Cherokee."[80]

Other scholars who are familiar with the Cherokee language and syllabary have looked the inscription over and have been unable to make a connection between the symbols and the originally theorized Cherokee premise. Joseph Mahan had issues with both the dating of the inscription in relation to the development of the Cherokee syllabary and the fact that the symbols simply did not closely match up with Cherokee writing.[81]

After being included in the 12th Annual BAE Report in 1894, the stone was all but forgotten for several decades. That is until someone came across the Bat Creek Stone and thought perhaps it was not Cherokee after all. The stone would once again stir mystery and controversy when it would raise the age old theory that perhaps Native Peoples were descendants of the Mound Builders and more specifically the Lost Tribes of Israel.

The Hebrew (Lost Tribes of Israel) Theory

There is a centuries old argument that the far reaching network of mounds in the eastern United States was built by a highly advanced civilization that predates the Indigenous populations of the Americas. Proponents of this theory have a wide ranging list of possible suspects for these earthen works from the mysterious unknown mound-builder race, to the Lost Tribes of Israel, and numerous other groups in between. For the purpose of this paper we will focus on the theory of the influence of the Lost Tribes of Israel having connections to the mounds and ultimately the Bat Creek Stone. The Lost Tribes of Israel refers to ten of the 12 tribes of Ancient Israel that were said to have been deported from the Kingdom of Israel after it was conquered by the Assyrians circa 722 B.C.E.[82] The ultimate whereabouts of these groups is not conclusively known while many theories abound including that the Indigenous peoples of the Americas are descended form one of these groups.

Arguments that the Indigenous populations of the Americas were the direct ancestors of the Lost Tribes of Israel have been published as far back as 1567. Initial publications theorized there was a presence in aboriginal culture of remnants of ancient Mosaic observance, such as the belief in a creator God and the practice of circumcision, indicated that the Native Americans were descended form the Lost Tribes.[83] Decades later other European theories developed that perhaps the Israelites never left the Middle East. It was believed by many that the Tartars, which

were a central Asian people, had migrated to the New World through Siberia and other means. The commonality between these opinions is the assumption that the Indigenous cultural history was the American installment of a story which began in the Old World and that the Native way of life retained an imprint of the originating culture.[84]

This mindset that the Native peoples in the Americas were either direct descendants of the Lost Tribes or had in some ways mixed with barbarian groups that had already assimilated the Lost Tribes had an underlying theme that helped spur great efforts by many European factions to civilize the Indigenous groups they were now in contact with. The premise that Natives were once civilized and once the chosen people, gave a framework to missionary work in the New World, one of the standard purposes of English colonization.[85] Several cultural components like stories, religious customs, and child rearing practices intrigued Europeans by how in their minds they mirrored closely with Christian practices.

James Adair was an English trader who spent 40 years traveling around the Southeastern United States, living with several Indigenous groups to include the Choctaw, Creek, and Cherokee among others. He published a book in 1775 that made several arguments to explain that all the Natives descended from Jews. Several components of his arguments about the connections of these groups is their languages and dialects; their physical characteristics; they way time is divided and tracked; cultural beliefs about marriage and adultery; their division into tribes; and many others. Adair claims in his book that the Cherokee among other groups in the Southeast use the word, "Yo He Wah".[86] He goes on to say this descends and has changed over time from the original term for "Jehovah".

In 1816, a mixed blood Cherokee preacher, Elias Boudinot, wrote about the possible connections of several Native groups and the Lost Tribes of Israel. Boudinot points out several

Indigenous stories from groups like the Huron, Iroquois, and Cherokee that have tales that mirror biblical stories like Cane and Able, Aaron, numerous tales of angels.[87] He goes on to describe several other connections that would go to support the theory that the Lost Tribes had made their way into the Americas. He points out the Land Bridge Theory and the fact that it was likely that not only the Israelites used that route but many other Asiatic and Middle Eastern groups did as well.[88]

In the 1830's many others wrote about the Native groups and their connections to Hebrew ancestors. John Howard Payne and Daniel S. Butrick compiled a vast amount of information from Cherokee elders and other tribal members. They also reference "Ye Ho Wah" who ordered the early Cherokees to build structures on mounds where they could worship him.[89] There is also a reference to a great flood that would wipe the world free of all the sinners if they tribe didn't turn from their sin.[90] Payne and Butrick were told these beliefs amongst many others were the ancient Cherokee beliefs. Many centuries, well before anyone could remember, a shift happened for the Cherokee that caused them to move away from these beliefs.

Many religious factions would use the proposed connection between the Lost Tribes and Native Americans to drive their philosophies of missionary work in early colonial periods and ultimately the idea for Manifest Destiny in the early 19th century. The Mormon Faith includes a belief that Native peoples are descendants from one of these groups called the Lamanites, and were punished by God and given darker skin and battled their more righteous, lighter skinned, neighbors. They were said to have arrived to North America by boat around 600 B.C.E.[91] According to the Book of Mormon, the Lamanites and their neighbors, the Nephites warred for centuries following their split with the Lamanites ultimately winning out and exterminating the

rival group.[92] This explains why only the Native Americans were here upon the arrival of the first Europeans in the context of the Book of Mormon.

Adair, Boudinot, Payne and Butrick, along with many others sited numerous examples of broad cultural similarities between Christian customs and Indigenous customs that they encountered. Were these connections legitimate or simply used as evidence to drive a deeper lying agenda for religious and political control over new land and new peoples?

Regardless of peoples' beliefs or motives, the theory about the Lost Tribes and their connection with tribal peoples of the Americas was a predominant one well through the 19th Century. As has already been discussed in the previous section, the primary purpose for the federally sanctioned BAE Mound Survey was to disprove that myth and conclude once and for all that the mounds were in fact built by the Indigenous peoples of the United States. The Mound Survey sought to conclude that there was no mystery race of mound builders that was much more civilized and advanced enough and that Native groups were more than capable of building these earthen works. So how does the Bat Creek Stone, with this mysterious inscription, play into the theory that there was in fact a Hebrew presence in the Pre-Columbian North America? How does the stone and the other artifacts that were pulled from the mound at Bat Creek in 1889, that were reported and published as being Cherokee, become the lynch pin for proponents of the Lost Tribes Theory? It all starts decades after the dig on Bat Creek when a patent clerk from Chicago stumbled on the stone and made what many would find to be a fascinating discovery.

The Bat Creek Inscription from a Different Perspective

In 1964, Henriette Mertz, was conducting research at the Smithsonian Institute's Museum of Natural History. She was looking at items pulled from various mounds when she came across the Bat Creek Stone. Mertz believed the original orientation of the stone, which was published in the 1894 Twelfth Annual BAE Report was upside down. Upon conducting her research she found that if the stone was rotated 180 degrees, she believed the symbols to be Phoenician.[93] Mertz was considered a very controversial figure in the fields of history and archaeology during the 1950's, 60's and 70's. She published several works that theorized many examples of Pre-Columbian Old World contact in the Americas.[94]

Though controversial, her work sparked the interest of many scholars on both sides of the isle regarding the idea of theory of Pre-Columbian contact by visitors from the Old World, none more than Cyrus Gordon. Gordon was a fellow Old World theorist, who some would call a "rogue professor" and others have labeled, "A scholar of enormous range."[95] Regardless of the opinions of some scholars about the research of Cyrus Gordon, he was considered to have done ground breaking work in the fields of linguistics and social history of the Middle East. He published 35 books and 350 articles that span 20 different academic categories.[96]

In 1971, Gordon wrote about the Bat Creek Stone and determined that the symbols were not Phoenician but a form of Paleo-Hebrew that would have been used around the First or Second Centuries A.D. in the time of Jewish revolt that was crushed by the Romans and Jews fled in exile. While the possibility of Jewish exiles making a trans-Atlantic trip that early on in history seems unlikely for many, it was still possible. There is an example of experimental trips with boats from that time period successfully making a trans-Atlantic voyage in 1969 and 1970.[97] All this experiment showed was that it was technologically possible for that trip to have

been made with the boats of the time thus showing the possibility of a successful voyage. Regarding the inscription Gordon wrote, "…unbeknownst to the academic world, a Hebrew inscription of Roman date (probably around A.D. 135) was scientifically excavated in Tennessee in 1889 and published by Cyrus Thomas. Thomas without understanding the nature of the writing, published the text upside down…and quite erroneously surmised it to be in the Cherokee script."[98]

Gordon's study of the inscription would lead him to match the symbols to those that are known to be own Hebrew coins of the Bar Kokhba revolt referenced above.[99] He would do a detailed linguistic analysis of each symbol where he made strong comparisons to other known Hebrew inscriptions. These comparisons matched up the linguistic characteristics with the historic chronological events that would give enough leeway for a band of fleeing Hebrews to have reached the Americas.[100]

From Gordon's analysis of the Bat Creek inscription he came up with a clearly defined translation. He determined the characters to read "LYHWD" with a word divider followed by "QS". Gordon's translation in sequence LYHWD means "for (L) Judea (YHWD)."[101] The inscription also consisted of two more symbols, which Gordon determined to be QS, which in Hebrew translates to "end". Gordon surmised that in this context, the complete translation of the inscription which reads QS – LYHWD would thus be "The Golden Age of the Jews."[102] In 1974, Gordon would publish another book, in which part was dedicated to the continued discussion of the Bat Creek Inscription where he made connections to other known Hebrew texts and with the Modern Hebrew writing system.[103]

This translation and perspective on the stone was completely opposite from anything that Emmert or Thomas would have expected when the stone was discovered in 1889. However, it

was thoroughly researched and spurred great debate and discussion for years to come. Many sought to discredit Gordon while others came to his defense. Gordon knew full well that making the claims he did regarding the inscription along with his other research would probably alienate him with his colleagues. He said, "No politically astute member of the establishment who prizes his professional reputation is likely to risk his good name for the sake of a truth that his peers may not be prepared to accept for fifty or a hundred years."[104]

Some scholars out there have remained open to various opinions and have sought not to academically destroy others perspectives but taken each respective theory and investigated them respectively. One such scholar is Huston McCulloch, who in 1988, wrote an article which outlined the different theories from it being a forgery to the inscription being either Cherokee or Hebrew. He makes an interesting chart comparing the Bat Creek inscription and two variations of the Cherokee syllabary.[105] Of the eight symbols of the Bat Creek inscription, 2 had a good correlation, 3 were fair, 1 was conceivable, and 2 were impossible.[106]

McCulloch then goes on to analyze the inscription form the Hebrew perspective using the same form of criteria for establishing a correlation between the symbols with early Hebrew writing. In his Hebrew comparison, McCulloch finds that 4 of the characters have a good correlation and 4 have a fair correlation.[107] Not one of the symbols according to McCulloch's criteria falls into the lower two categories of "Conceivable or Impossible." He doesn't go as far as to say that the Bat Creek inscription is conclusively Hebrew. On the contrary he simply states that the correlation is there and it is of enough significance that until a better alternative is proposed, we should find the Hebrew connection to be entirely persuasive.[108]

These conclusions were seen as controversial as well and scholars sought to discredit McCulloch as well, thus ensued an academic debate in several journals and other publications for

several years. In 1993, McCulloch wrote a rebuttal to scholars who questioned his rationale about the Bat Creek Stone. In this article he reiterates his points on the linguistic points of the inscription. However, he also discusses some of the associated artifacts found along with the stone. He primarily focuses on the brass bracelets that were originally thought to be copper in 1889. Brass is an alloy of copper and zinc that requires sophisticated knowledge of metallurgy and was not believed to be to have been made in the New World before Columbus.[109]

McCulloch continues by stating that Cyrus Thomas not only misrepresented the inscription as being Cherokee but also misidentified the bracelets and copper when in fact they were brass.[110] The composition of the bracelets and other physical characteristics such as their manufacture cause them to standout from other trade item artifacts pulled form other mounds. Note that had it not been for Cyrus Gordon's identification of the inscription as being Paleo-Hebrew, the bracelets form the Bat Creek dig would never have been tested and would still be assumed to be copper.[111] For the case of misidentification of the copper bracelets, how do we now know that more of the copper items pulled from dozens of other mounds were in fact brass? This raises the issue that critics to the Lost Tribe Theory bring up concerning the lack of physical evidence from other locations throughout the Southeast or anywhere in the Americas for that matter.

The theory about the presence of the Lost Tribes of Israel in the New World is one that goes back centuries. At the time of discovery of the Bat Creek Stone, it seemed as though that theory had been laid to rest. In actuality the stone with its mysterious inscription would serve to spark a great debate, giving proponents of the Hebrew theory solid proof that early Jews were here long before Columbus, and giving doubters a new means to further discredit a long standing myth.

Arguments Against the Hebrew (Lost Tribes of Israel) Theory

As outlined in the previous section, the theory of the Lost Tribes of Israel being early inhabitants of pre-Columbian America, and having their hands in the creation of the mounds, and ultimately creating grave goods like the Bat Creek Stone has been prevalent for centuries. While most scholars and religious leaders in the early times held onto the Hebrew theory, some early writers attributed the existence of the mounds to the Indigenous peoples of the Americas. Notably, William Bartram whose writings were used prominently by Cyrus Thomas. Bartram concluded that, "…the mounds were built by Indians and that the first advent of the white man they (mounds) were in common use among this people in the southeastern section."[112] Proponents of the Hebrew theory regarding the Bat Creek inscription have worked extremely hard to convince established academics to open their minds to the possibility that the stone is finally the conclusive evidence of paleo-Hebrew influence in the Southeast. However, for many including the establishment of mainstream archaeologists, the stone from Bat Creek is nothing more than another fraud.

The de facto representatives of mainstream archaeologists and their negative opinion of the inscription on the Bat Creek Stone are Robert C. Mainfort, Jr. and Mary L. Kwas. They have written detailed responses to McCulloch's articles that they feel points out the many faults in the conclusion the stone's inscription is authentic. In 1991, Mainfort and Kwas outlined a detailed argument against cult archaeologists who use the stone as incontrovertible evidence of pre-Columbian Old World contracts.[113] Archaeologists in no way deny that there was pre-Columbian voyages to the New World. What many point out, however, is that with the exception of the Norse settlement in Northeast Canada, no convincing evidence for such occurrences has ever been found or recognized by professional researchers.[114] Professional

archaeologists conducted vast research along the Atlantic Coast of Canada. The research showed an established Norse presence in the region that included trash pits, camp sites, and in some cases semi-permanent settlements that date back at least five centuries before Columbus.[115] The vast amount of material culture left across the coast of Canada is exactly the type evidence mainstream archaeologists use to determine a cultural presence.

Therefore, the absence of credible evidence of a sustained presence of any group other than the Norse settlement referenced above or the Indigenous peoples of the Americas, is proof for mainstream archaeologists that no other groups were here prior to Columbus's voyage in the late 15th Century. The thought in this case is, "If a large contingent of Hebrews moved through the Ohio Valley, down in the Southeastern United States, building thousands of mounds, they would surely have left behind villages littered with material objects diagnostic of their culture and easily distinguishable from that of the Native people already here."[116] Simply put, if the Lost Tribes of Israel were here they would have left behind more than a few inscribed stones in obscure locations.

Turning our attention specifically to the Bat Creek Stone, mainstream archaeologists have combed through all the known research and testing that has been conducted on the stone and the associated artifacts found with it. In almost every publication of scholars that do not believe in the Hebrew theory, they take the opportunity to discredit and challenge either the credentials or the professionalism of what they call "rogue or hack" archaeologists. Proponents of the Hebrew Theory like McCulloch and Gordon fall under what some have called the archetypical example of rogue professors who have lost the absolutely essential ability to make qualitative assessments of the data they are studying by ignoring scientific standards of testing and veracity."[117] Several specific examples of Bat Creek research has been reexamined by mainstream archaeologists

using the highest scientific standards in the field and supporting their findings by other established credible colleagues.

First, radiocarbon dating of the wooden ear spools that were associated with the dig, which produced the Bat Creek Stone, are believed to be compromised by the wet conditions of the mound itself. The wood samples returned a calibrated radiocarbon age of 32-769 A.D. with a median age of 427 A.D.[118] The earspools were described as being dyed green from the copper bracelets that were also found in the Bat Creek Mound. The mound was reported to be very damp at the base, which would make sense considering it was at the fork of Bat Creek and the Tennessee River. It has been argued that, "While it is possible that the wood fragments represent the remains of an object placed with the deceased individual, they might also have been derived from the "dark soil" (possibly a midden deposit) at the base of the mound in question."[119] The mention of the state of the soil and the likely presence of groundwater as the cause, raises a likely possibility of contamination to the tested wood samples.

Next in question comes the actual inscription itself. Mainfort and Kwas, admittedly not experts in paleo-Hebrew script, asked Frank Moore Cross, Hancock Professor of Hebrew and Other Oriental Languages at Harvard University to review the possible connections of the Bat Creek inscription with early Hebrew writing. The summary of Cross's conclusion of the inscription is that the first five symbols are almost impossible as fitting into the right time period (100 B.C.E.-100 A.D.) as Jewish revolt that the reported Hebrews supposedly fled and made a trans-Atlantic voyage.[120] The remaining three symbols are impossible of being paleo-Hebrew and even Mainfort and Kwas agree they more closely resemble Cherokee. The problem with the Cherokee comparison is that the inscription is not translatable as Cherokee, with not one single Cherokee authority regarding the inscription as genuine.[121] All these inconsistencies with the

inscription point towards it being a forgery, and a poor one at that. Mainstream archaeologists provide further evidence using more of the associated artifacts, to debunk the Hebrew myth related to Bat Creek.

The brass bracelets that were found in the grave along with the Bat Creek Stone have also been used by both sides to prove their theories. For mainstream archaeologists, the bracelets are clearly trade items represented in dozens of other post-European contact mounds in the Southeast.[122] The bracelets were originally categorized as copper by Cyrus Thomas, which makes since in the historic context as countless other artifacts of a similar nature have been found before or since and have been determined to be copper or later testing would determine they were in fact brass.

How does this fact determine that the bracelets are of Hebrew origins as proponents of the Hebrew theory have sought to prove? The fact is that it does not. Testing has shown that the brass used to form the bracelets from Bat Creek contains 66.5-68.2 percent copper and 26.5-27.5 percent zinc.[123] This ratio is in fact consistent with similar items from the Roman period but were also produced in England during the 18th and 19th centuries.[124] Another fact that archaeologists say points to the likelihood that the bracelets and the grave as a whole were more than likely post-European contact.

The discovery of the Bat Creek Stone falls into a period in archaeology were a large number of known fraudulent artifacts were "discovered". Most of the artifacts said to support the Hebrew theory were discovered primarily between the mid-nineteenth into the early twentieth century, a period during which there was enormous controversy concerning the origins of the mound builders.[125] As the discipline of archaeology developed, no artifact even remotely similar to the Bat Creek Stone or many other of the questionable artifacts discovered in the era

referenced above has been found in any modern digs. Many other digs from which questionable artifacts were unearthed have similar elements of spotty field work led by questionable field assistants.[126] Also the fact that many of these finds have been ignored by contemporary archaeologists, points to the fact that the controversial finds are questionable at best and more likely deliberate frauds.

The prevalence of frauds during the time of the Bat Creek dig, for many, brings into question the character of the discoverers of such artifacts. The circumstances around the employment of John Emmert by the BAE will be described in detail below but it is important to note here that prior to the Bat Creek dig, he reportedly practiced less than reputable field techniques. In 1883, Emmert was employed by the Harvard Peabody Museum on digs in North Carolina and Tennessee. At a single cave site in Tennessee, Emmert reported to finding a cache of artifacts that ranged from Paleoindian times to the historic period.[127] By today's standards in archaeology the possibility of items spanning 11,000 years in the same chamber of a cave is unrealistic for any legitimate archaeological site. This begs the question if Emmert had produced some questionable finds in the past, what was to say that he produced another at Bat Creek in attempts to impress his employer? For established archaeologists, the likelihood of Emmert producing a fraud was much more likely than Hebrew outcasts making their way to the New World.

Forgery Theories

Most scholars in the established fields of archaeology and anthropology would scoff at the proponents of the Hebrew theory that were outlined in the previous section. Many think that the easiest and most obvious way to fake a Hebrew presence would be with an inscription. It would have been much more difficult to create entire sites with trash pits, house remains, and

burials that reflect the morphology, artifact type, skeletons, and burial practices appropriate of Hebrews dating to the first century.[128] Unlike the previous theory however there simply is not much written regarding the belief that the inscription on the stone pulled from the Tipton Mound on Bat Creek is a forgery. There have been two theories proposed about the motives of a possible forgery that are worth outlining in order to give the reader other perspectives from the previous theories. Was the motive to forge the inscription a desperate attempt by John Emmert to impress his boss with a ground breaking archaeological find that would give him sustained employment with the BAE? Was the stone planted in the Bat Creek mound by a rival BAE field assistant who felt Emmert had cut him out of several projects? Or is the motive much more complex than that, with elements of revenge from an embittered political rival seeking to embarrass a rival faction and deface the federal government? One theory seeks to use academic support to disprove the authenticity of the inscription while the other uses a series of historical facts mixed with interesting coincidences to hypothesize a much deeper reaching plot.

Theory of Emmert Forgery

John Emmert is an interesting character within the Bat Creek Story. Emmert was a native of East Tennessee from the town of Bristol. He was a Civil War veteran on the side of the Confederacy and a devoted Democrat. Emmert sustained an injury during the war along with some lingering illnesses that plagued him throughout the rest of his life. He was not formally educated but following the Civil War he found employment as a field assistant for Cyrus Thomas and the BAE Mound Survey Project. He worked for several years before falling out of favor with Cyrus Thomas due to poor field habits, a reported drinking problem and ultimately a lack of BAE funding which resulted in Emmert's termination.[129]

In 1888, Emmert sought reinstatement after writing a letter to President Grover Cleveland and Tennessee Senator Isham Harris requesting to continue work with the BAE.[130] The BAE was formally requested to rehire Emmert for the duration of the Mound Survey. In a letter dated September 20th, 1888, Cyrus Thomas informs Major Powell that Emmert reportedly struggled with certain personal issues that "render his work uncertain."[131] It took several months but in 1889 Emmert was begrudgingly given work in large part to his experience in the east Tennessee region and his familiarity with Cherokee. Knowing that his supervisors were pressured into rehiring him, it has been theorized by several that Emmert would do anything to find a monumental artifact to gain favor with his employers. Many in the established field of archaeology believe, "that Emmert's motive for producing the Bat Creek inscription was that he felt the best way to insure permanent employment with the Mound Survey was to find and outstanding artifact, and how better to impress Cyrus Thomas than to "find" an object that would prove Thomas' theory that the Cherokee built most of the mounds in eastern Tennessee? In early 1889 Emmert resumed his excavations under Thomas' direction, and by February 15 he had "found" the Bat Creek Stone.[132]

Other scholars through the years have implied that Emmert's field techniques were suspect at best and numerous other finds from digs in the east Tennessee region are suspect. One scholar said, "It is impossible to use the data presented by Thomas in the Twelfth Annual Report of the BAE with any conviction that they present a complete or even, in some cases, an accurate picture of the material which Emmert excavated in the Tennessee Area.[133] Emmert also reportedly unearthed examples of domed stone vaults within mounds and an example of a clay canoe shaped coffin. The importance of this in the field of archaeology is that these remain a

unique occurrence.[134] These anomalies within the field are immediate red flags to established and disciplined archaeologists.

Several problems arise with the theory that Emmert forged the inscription and staged the discovery of the Bat Creek Stone. First, Emmert was seeking proof that the mounds were constructed by the Cherokee in the region. When he found the stone could he have jumped to the conclusion that this inscription was a form of Cherokee? It is possible, however, one would think he would have been familiar with the Cherokee writing system from his previous work in the region to know that several of the characters were obviously not Cherokee. If Emmert was forging the inscription, would he not have mirrored it with the Cherokee syllabary so that it was impossible to question its language origins?

Another issue with both the idea of the forgery is the perceived age of the mound and the fact that it was reported to be an unobtrusive burial within the mound itself. Once again according to the field notes and the 12th Annual Report of the BAE, the mound is described as, "Some large sassafras trees were standing on it, and the owner, Mr. Tipton, stated that he had cut trees from it forty years ago, and that it had been covered by a cluster of trees and grapevines as long as the oldest settler in the locality could recollect.[135] This would lead one to believe that the mound had been undisturbed for quite a long time. Emmert also describes the mound as having a packed and extremely consistent composition with a rotten stump coming out of the top of it, which had roots running all the way to the base of the mound.[136] If one combines these facts and also factors in the results form an Archaeopetrography study conducted on the stone in 2010 that determined that the inscribed stone and all the other artifacts and remains found in the mound with it can be no younger than when the bodies of the deceased were buried inside the mound.[137]

The study did an in-depth analysis by performing petrographic observations using reflected light microscopy and micro-photo documentation on the artifact; performing scanning electron microscopy (SEM) analysis; and conducted a document review of the 1889 field notes from the Bat Creek Dig. In lemans terms, the study conducted a microscopic investigation of each character of the inscription on the Bat Creek Stone, in hopes of determining the relative ageing of the inscription. The study determined that the entire surface of the inscription of the stone was lightly polished which rounded the edges of the carved grooves of the inscribed characters.[138] Each one of the inscription's characters were extremely smooth and weathered, and were free from any of the silty slay particles that they were buried within. The report concluded that since the orange colored silty-clay was not observed in the grooves of the inscription and the overall surface of the stone and the edges of the grooves were polished at the time of the discovery, the inscription had to have been made prior to the excavation of the mound by John Emmert.[139] This is important because it is noted that other markings on the stone were very jagged, not weathered, and contained clay particles with in the scratches. These marks were made on the opposite side of the stone when it was struck by Emmert's probing rod upon its discovery.[140] This serves as evidence that this newer mark along with two scratches that were not drawn on the original picture of the stone but appeared in 1971 with the next available photo, were much newer than the original inscription.

At the end of the day, we may never really know if Emmert forged the inscription in hopes of gaining notoriety or sustaining employment. Others have theorized the Emmert may have even forged the inscription with an Old World script with the calculated purpose of embarrassing Thomas and others at the Smithsonian who had denied him permanent employment for so many years.[141] All we have to go off of are his letters and field notes along with

subsequent testing that tends to support Emmert's claims of discovery but nothing to authenticate the origin of the inscription itself. It was evident that Cyrus Thomas was at least intrigued and cautious enough to send one of his main assistants down to Bat Creek from Washington, D.C. to check the validity of Emmert's claims. Thomas' assistant immediately reported back with the news that things were just as Emmert had claimed in his reports.[142] Satisfied by his assistant's review of the Bat Creek Dig, Thomas eliminated the possibility of fraud in his little-known work from 1889 entitled The Cherokees in Pre-Columbian Times.[143] Despite this and the scientific reports mentioned above many in the fields of archaeology and anthropology refuse to believe that the inscription is anything more than a forgery. The lack of other authenticated occurrences of similar items and the numerous documented instances of forgeries in the field at the time lead established scholars to question the validity of the Bat Creek inscription and the man who discovered it.

Theory of Blackman Forgery

While the predominant theory in academia is that John Emmert is the most likely culprit if in fact the inscription on the Bat Creek Stone is a forgery, there is however another theory that has been documented that offers a different spin on a forgery theory. It is an interesting twist in the saga of the Bat Creek Stone. Much of this story is circumstantial but puts together an interesting mix of factors and characters to raise suspicions of possibility.

Luther Meade Blackman was originally from Connecticut and came to live in Knoxville, TN following the death of his parents in 1855. After moving to Tennessee, Blackman became a stone engraver for a company that made tombstones and monuments. A few years later he purchased his own rock quarry on Bat Creek where he worked until Civil War broke out.

Blackman, having roots in the North, was a staunch Republican and Union sympathizer.[144] Blackman joined a Union Cavalry unit where he was commissioned as Second Major.

At the war's end, Blackman returned to find his business had been destroyed by Confederates forcing him to pursue a new career in politics. Blackman held a position as both Postmaster and Tax Collector from 1870-1890 for Monroe County, TN. This job was part of the Federal Patronage system, which benefited the very powerful Republican Party in eastern Tennessee. When Grover Cleveland was elected President he passed the Pendleton Act that supposedly did away with the Patronage system.[145] In fact all it did was move many Republicans out of federal jobs and replace them with Democrats. Recall that John Emmert solicited a position with the BAE and was successful as a result of his Democratic ties to the Cleveland Administration.

The motive behind this theory is that Blackman sought to embarrass Emmert and the federally sanctioned BAE employees as political pay back for many of his friends and colleagues losing their jobs throughout the region. If one pieces this motive along with a couple of influential pieces of circumstantial evidence, this theory becomes plausible. Blackman, owned property and a business where he served as a stone engraver only miles from the Tipton Farm where the mound was excavated, and his neighbor was Jim Lawson who worked on the Bat Creek dig and was present for the time of the discovery of the stone.[146] This claim has also been supported in another publication from Lowell Kirk that states, "Blackman was determined to get the old Confederate fired again, this time using a local boy that Emmert had hired to do the actual digging, as he himself was disabled. They gave it to Emmert, who claimed to have found it himself."[147] Kirk who is a retired History Professor from Hiawassee College went on to bluntly conclude that if there were Hebrews in Monroe County 2000 years ago, they did not engrave the

Bat Creek Stone. Luther Blackman did it in 1889.[148] Perhaps most important to this theory was the fact that Blackman was a third Degree Mason. This is important because the inscription on the stone closely resembles a Masonic script that would have been readily accessible for Blackman.[149] A connection with the Masonic script has also been made to John Emmert by some in mainstream archaeology.[150] All of this evidence pointing towards Blackman as the forger is intriguing but circumstantial. Would a forged artifact have a significant impact on the Democratic Party? Most likely not especially considering that 1889 was an election year and the Republicans were strong contenders to regain the White House so no need to risk a backfire.[151] Also it was a known that Major Blackman kept track of all his business dealings. Whether good or bad, Blackman recorded his transactions in his diaries and journals and there is no mention of anything related to the Bat Creek dig in any of his writings.[152]

While this theory seems fanciful and full of soap opera type story lines, there is enough circumstantial evidence to create a possible scenario where Blackmon did in fact create this forgery in the hopes of smearing his political rivals.

The mystery, intrigue, and controversy around the Bat Creek Stone has been present since its discovery in 1889. First it was believed to be Cherokee. Then it was believed to be of Hebrew or Middle Eastern origins. Several other theories have been proposed with Masonic links. Proponents of each of these theories have battled over who is right and who is wrong for decades. Conspiracy theorists believe the establishment of academia is threatened by the possibilities the inscription brings to the table for potentially re-writing our history. Most scholars believe that proponents of the Hebrew theory are “rogue professors” or “cult archaeologists”.[153]

From a tribal perspective, the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians believes that the inscription is not Cherokee. In fact nothing has been published that any Cherokee scholar has ever agreed with Cyrus Thomas's interpretation of the inscription on the Bat Creek Stone, nor are there any references to the stone in the Cherokee linguistic or ethnographic literature.[154] It is important to note here as well that the theory regarding the Hebrew's role in the Bat Creek inscription and at a higher level the mounds themselves, is culturally degrading to the Cherokee, and represents for many, a racist mindset that the Indigenous peoples of the Southeast were not able to conceive of building structures such as the mounds. "That these types of structures were constructed without elaborate technology, beyond baskets, digging sticks, and human hands suggests a sophisticated understanding of engineering and geometry."[155]

Still the fact remains there is no concrete proof to the inscription's origin. No where has it been documented that a forger has taken responsibility. No where has an accuser been able to go beyond speculation or circumstantial evidence to make an accusation. On the other hand scientific tests have been conducted that lean to the idea that the stone, along with the associated artifacts were buried centuries ago in what was an undisturbed site until 1889 when John Emmert excavated the mound on the banks of Bat Creek.

In order for any of these theories to be proven or dismissed, hard evidence will have to be uncovered. There is new state-of-the-art testing that can be conducted of all the items that could shine new light on the subject and help bring clarity to this controversy. The following section chronicles the Museum's decision to request the stone and associated artifacts from the Smithsonian and examines the agreement between the Smithsonian and the Museum of the Cherokee Indian pertaining to the Bat Creek Stone. The next section will also detail the process by which the Museum of the Cherokee Indian, working in consultation with leading forensic

archaeologists, determined the specific tests that could potentially provide the necessary information to verify or at least, dismiss the above theories.

Chapter 3 - The Bat Creek Stone Comes to Cherokee

As previously discussed, there is a stirring controversy surrounding the Bat Creek Stone and the origin of its mysterious inscription. We now turn to a discussion of how the Stone was brought to the Museum of the Cherokee Indian, the lengthy process it required, and the associated testing requested on the Stone and the associated artifacts found with it.

Requesting the Return of the Stone

In 2009 the Museum of the Cherokee Indian (MCI) was approached by EBCI tribal member and Museum donor, Leslie Kalen, with the story of the Bat Creek Stone. The Stone, on long-term loan from the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History (NMNH), had been on display for years over in the McClung Anthropology Museum in Knoxville, TN for years as a supplement of their vast collection of artifacts from the TVA Tellico project. The Tellico Archaeological Project was a major undertaking by the TVA to document the vast area of archaeological sites in East Tennessee prior to the flooding of several river valleys in the region as a result of several dams being built across the region.

The MCI staff and Board of Directors was intrigued by the story of the Bat Creek Stone. Initial research on the background and history of the Stone was conducted. In a letter dated Nov. 27th, 2009, MCI Board Chairman, Robert Blankenship officially requested the loan of the Bat Creek Stone to the Eastern Band and the Museum of the Cherokee Indian from the National Museum of Natural History. The letter states the requested loan is for the purpose of conducting testing on the artifact to support a new documentary.[156] This original request set off a long process and back-and-forth between the MCI and the NMNH regarding the loan of the Stone.

Over the course of the next year, as the MCI staff learned more about the Bat Creek Stone and the associated artifacts, additional requests were made via phone calls and a series of

emails. New requests were made for the repatriation of the human remains associated with the Bat Creek dig and the associated bracelets and ear spools as well. The requests for testing evolved into DNA testing of the human remains, and non-evasive testing of the Bat Creek Stone itself. These additional tests raised numerous concerns by the NMNH staff and added new complexities and steps in the loan process.[157]

While the new testing requests on the human remains raised concerns, other testing was approved on the Stone itself. In May and June of 2010, Scott Wolter, a forensic geologist, along with MCI staff were allowed to conduct Scanning Electron Microscopy (SEM) analysis on the Stone and its inscription. The results of this testing, already discussed in a previous section, reported that markings made on the stone as a result of the excavation, was much newer and fresher than the inscription itself. The report goes on to reference the inscription being weathered and smoothed compared to the newer marks being made during the excavation. The report stated, "The inscribed stone and all the other artifacts and remains found in the mound with it, can be no younger than when the bodies of the deceased were buried inside the mound."[158]

Just like working through any bureaucracy the loan process of the Bat Creek Stone was painfully slow. To add to the slow process, the NMNH curatorial staff saw significant turnover. In 2011 discussions between the MCI staff and the new head of Anthropology at NMNH, Dr. MaryJo Arnoldi, took place to help revive talks of the loan. The tribe and the MCI were informed that some archaeological materials associated with the Bat Creek dig were lost, including teeth and the jawbone from the human remains. As a result of the news of the misplaced human remains in the NMNH's care, the EBCI decided to take a more aggressive approach. The NMNH was presented with a letter from the Principal Chief of the EBCI, Michell Hicks, again requesting the return of the Stone and associated artifacts to the tribe. The letter

states, "The Stone and remains were excavated by the Smithsonian from a mound in East Tennessee, where the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians has a historic cultural affiliation."[159] The letter was also accompanied with a unanimously approved resolution from the EBCI Tribal Council requesting the return of the Stone and all the objects including the remains.

It would be yet another 6 months before the NMNH would respond to the MCI and the tribe regarding the loan. In an email on April 16th, 2012, Susan Crawford informed the MCI staff that they could proceed with the loan request. However, due to being at full capacity for loan requests for the next year, no new loan requests would be reviewed until March of 2013 with approved loans shipping after January 2014.[160] The tribe then continued its more aggressive approach by soliciting the support of the BIA regional Superintendent and the US Representative for North Carolina, Mark Meadows. The Smithsonian ultimately agreed to loan the Bat Creek Stone to the Museum of the Cherokee Indian in 2014.

While the lengthy review period was frustrating, it also gave the MCI staff sufficient time to plan for and prepare for the NMNH's stringent conservation, storage, and infrastructure criteria as part of the loan requirements. In order to be able to accept the loan of the Stone, the Museum of the Cherokee Indian was required to complete a detailed site report. The site report asked extremely detailed questions regarding museum infrastructure questions such as lighting used, type of paint on the exhibit walls, security and fire suppression systems, and building and exhibit design specs.

During this time, the MCI staff had also contacted Dr. Johnathan Leader, State Archaeologist of South Carolina about the Stone. Dr. Leader is a leading archaeologist in the region that is known for using cutting edge non-evasive testing on archaeological items. Dr. Leader advised that the Stone could be tested to see if it had ever been in the presence of human

decomposition by a testing the presence of lipids. The test would be non-evasive using a chemical lightly coated on the stone, bracelets, and other items from the mound and placed under a particular type of light to expose the presence of lipids resulting from the breakdown of human remains. Dr. Leader also identified other testing that could be used to determine type of tool used to make the inscription, the direction the inscription was inscribed, and make of items. Below is a chart that outlines all the testing that Dr. Leader informed the MCI staff on as options for testing the Bat Creek Stone and the associated artifacts:

PROPOSED TESTING ON BAT CREEK STONE AND ASSOCIATED ARTIFACTS			
ARTIFACT	TESTS	RATIONALE	NOTES
BAT CREEK STONE	LIPID ANALYSIS	Test will determine if stone was in contact with human decomposition.	This is the key test to determining if the stone was truly discovered in an undisturbed mound under a skull as indicated in the Bat Creek Dig field notes.
	XRF: X-Ray Fluorescence	To examine from a technical viewpoint of how the inscription was made.	Specific tool types along with manufacturing techniques could be crucial to determining how the inscription was made.
	Lithic Analysis of Inscription	Test will offer a microscopic analysis of particles in the inscription to determine age and tools used.	A similar test was conducted by Scott Wolter at the McClung Museum. Consider this a second opinion of the Wolter Report findings.
	Scanning Electron Microscope	A forensic examination for tool marks, tool type used, etc.	This test would be to add another layer of determination upon the other testing.
COPPER BRACELETS	LIPID ANALYSIS	Test will determine if bracelets were in contact with human decomposition.	This is the key test to determining if the bracelets were truly discovered in an undisturbed mound under a skull as indicated in the Bat Creek Dig field notes.
	XRF: X-Ray Fluorescence	To examine from a technical viewpoint of how the bracelets were made	Specific tool types along with manufacturing techniques could be crucial to determining what area of the world the bracelets were made in as well as the time period.
	X-Radiography	To collect information on tools used to work the metal, annealing, and crystallography.	This test is the type formerly used in mammography and will yield 1:1 measurements.
PAINT STONE	STEREO MICROSCOPE SCAN	Test will yield information on the manufacture.	Test has a capability of 20x-40x as well as photo capability.
BONE AWL	XRF: X-Ray Fluorescence	To examine from a technical viewpoint of how the awl was made	Specific tool types along with manufacturing techniques could be crucial to determining what area of the world the awl was made in as well as the time period.
	STEREO MICROSCOPE SCAN	Test will yield information on the manufacture; material (typical split deer ulna or a different species); whether any materials were embedded during its use; whether any polish or striations indicate more about its use.	Test has a capability of 20x-40x as well as photo capability.
	LIPID ANALYSIS	To determine if awl contained evidence of being used.	Test would be conducted on the end that was held in the hand for sewing.
WOOD FRAGMENTS FROM EARSPOOLS	XRF: X-Ray Fluorescence	Test will yield information on the manufacture; what tools were used from the southeastern woodworking tradition and tool kit (shark's teeth, beaver incisors, shark skin sandpaper, etc.)	Specific tool types along with manufacturing techniques could be crucial to determining what time period the spools were made. Previous radiocarbon dating of the fragments as reported in the Wolter Report yielded dates of 32 AD-769 AD with a dendrocalibrated date of 427 AD. The report cover letter, however, indicated that a relatively small amount of carbon was recovered from the fragments, possibly because of the proximity to the copper bracelets.

If the testing would be allowed their results could prove potentially ground breaking in the fields of history, archaeology and anthropology. Several questions could be answered and in fact raised by the testing results. What if it was proven that the items had in fact been in the long-term presence of human decomposition? What if tests showed that the inscription on the Stone was made by a stone tool or primitive metal tool? What if the inscription had been inscribed in a right to left direction in line with Hebrew script? On the opposite side of testing, what if the lipid analysis proved negative and the tests proved the Stone was never in the long-term presence of a grave? What if the inscription was determined to be made by a modern metal tool and inscribed in a left to right direction? The answers to these questions could prove or disprove the various theories surrounding the Bat Creek Stone.

In January 2014 the Museum of the Cherokee Indian was presented with the Bat Creek Stone as a long term loaned artifact from the NMNH. The Stone was housed in a fire proof safe mounted in an NMNH certified museum quality artifact case. Following the acquisition of the artifact the Museum of the Cherokee Indian held a charrette with representatives from each theory on the Stone, the tribe, and scientists in order to discuss all the perspectives and brainstorm on possible exhibits to tell the story. The MCI staff took input form all perspectives and discussed the testing options as they developed plans to move forward. The MCI staff took the input from Dr. Leader and submitted a request to the NMNH staff to conduct the non-evasive testing.

By this time the NMNH staff was apparently getting frustrated as well by all the requests. There was a sharp comment made from the NMNH staff in a phone conversation relating the Bat Creek Stone to other make-believe things like unicorns. In an email to the MCI staff in February of 2014 the NMNH issued an apology for the unprofessional response and issued an official

statement on the Bat Creek Stone. In part, the statement said, "While recognizing that a diversity of opinion continues to circulate around the authenticity of the Bat Creek Stone, the curators in the Department of Anthropology at the National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, believe that the inscriptions on the artifact are forgeries and that the artifact is a fake."[161]

From this point, the MCI staff requested permission to conduct the testing outlined in the above chart on the Bat Creek Stone and associated artifacts. As mentioned previously, as part of the loan criteria the tribal museum had to meet very strict requirements to be in compliance with the loan agreement. One of those requirements was that the artifact was conserved and placed in a extremely secure museum quality mount. The artifact mount and conservation came at a cost of approximately $15,000, which the Museum of the Cherokee Indian paid. Due to the Stone being mounted in such a secure way, the NMNH raised concerns on the ability to conduct the requested testing in the artifacts mounted state.[162] Following this determination, discussion of testing took a back seat to discussions of moving forward with how the tribal museum was going to tell the story of the Bat Creek Stone through an exhibit. What was the role and responsibility of the Museum of the Cherokee in telling this controversial story? What story would the tribe tell through an exhibit?

The Museum of the Cherokee Indian's Role in Telling the Story of the Bat Creek Stone

The Museum of the Cherokee Indian was made aware of the Bat Creek Stone in 2009. It was an obscure piece of the largest archaeological endeavor in the history of the United States. Once the Stone and the associated artifacts and remains were brought to the MCI's attention, their Board and staff became interested enough in the fascinating story to pursue learning more and investigating the matter further. As polarizing as the Stone has proven to be across many

fields of academia the Museum of the Cherokee Indian found itself in a difficult position. How does the tribal museum tell such a controversial story while preserving not only their organizational integrity within the museum world, while keeping their Board Members and donors pleased, but more importantly upholding Cherokee oral traditions and history?

The Museum of the Cherokee Indian, aware that it's approach to exhibiting the Stone would have important consequences, first had to determine the Museum's primary role in telling the Bat Creek Stone's story. The MCI staff approached their exhibit approach from three different perspectives. They could serve as an objective arbitrator between conflicting opinions on the Stone. The Museum could also serve as an objective chronicler of the Stone's history, including the many theories surrounding it. Finally the Museum could serve in the role as guardian of Cherokee history, culture, and self-determination.

While all these roles each present opportunities and challenges, in the end the Museum of the Cherokee Indian chose an extremely Indigenous approach to the creation of this exhibit. In the Cherokee culture, there is great value in being open to other people's opinions and cultures while at the same time being confident in your own beliefs. Using this traditional value the exhibit was designed with input from representatives from the EBCI Historic Preservation Office, Chief's Office, scholars from various backgrounds and opinions, and museum exhibit designers from Design Force, Inc.

In late 2014, the Museum of the Cherokee Indian in consultation with Design Force, designed preliminary exhibit specs and created story boards that fit into the scheme of the larger permanent exhibit. The exhibit design took the physical description of the Bat Creek dig and sought to create a large mural that brought the Tipton Farm to life and highlighted the three mounds described in the field notes. The story boards that were created sought to first outline

the history of the Bat Creek dig and then to outline the three main theories surrounding the Stone being the Stone was a forgery; the Stone was of Cherokee origin; or the Stone was proof of early Hebrew contact in North America.

The goals of the exhibit design were that visitors to the Museum would be presented with the history of the Bat Creek Stone and the theories that accompany it, and then let them make up their own minds about what they believe. The designs were presented to the MCI Board and approved for fabrication. In 2015, the Bat Creek Stone exhibit was installed in the permanent exhibit at the Museum of the Cherokee Indian. Since the exhibit opened, the Bat Creek Stone continues to spur debate and intrigue. The Museum of the Cherokee Indian navigated the difficult road of exhibiting such a controversial item while seeking to preserve their organizational integrity and tell the story from a tribal perspective and world view. The Museum chose a courageous stance on this exhibit in that it sought not to be a myth buster but more as a story-teller. A story-teller who values tribal traditions and beliefs while be open and excepting of others' opinions and leaving the interpretation up to their guests to decide for themselves. Despite all the controversies, lengthy loan process, political pressures, and donor influences, and financial investment the Museum of the Cherokee Indian completed an amazing journey to bring to life one of the most interesting exhibits in all tribal museums.

Chapter 4- Conclusion: The Stone, the Tribe, and the System, and the Role of the Museum

This paper has sought to tell the story of the Bat Creek Stone and its potential to play a dynamic role in science, archaeology, Cherokee history and culture, and the exercise of tribal sovereignty. While the Stone is small in size, it is great in story. The Stone symbolizes possibilities for some. It also represents mythological fallacies for many others. Beyond either of these perspectives the Bat Creek Stone is an object that represents so many other artifacts throughout the museum world that have fascinating yet convoluted origins. How do museums, especially tribal museums, use these objects to tell their stories in the context of other viewpoints? Interpretive strategies for many museums have shifted from simply showcasing objects. Instead, concepts lead the exhibit in the telling of a story that resonates with both the historic and contemporary views.[163] Before the telling of the Museum of the Cherokee Indian's exhibit of the Bat Creek Stone could be explained, it was critical for this paper to provide the ethnographic, archaeological, and historic information of the tribe.

Thusly the paper started with a focus on providing historic and cultural background on the Cherokee people, as a means to build a foundation for the context of the tribe and its cultural development. Beginning from a tribal perspective as well as providing such in-depth analysis is aimed at putting the highest importance on the value of Indigenous oral traditions and beliefs. Nowhere in the Cherokee oral traditions are there examples of, much less allusions to a mound builder race. The Cherokee along with most other Southeastern tribes, developed this practice through centuries of tradition and cultural practice. From a tribal perspective the Cherokee people were created in the Great Smoky Mountains. There are theories on the origins of their actual arrival through a linguistic path and other avenues. However, the tribe's creation story

and subsequent stories place the tribe and its first members in the mountains with a deep-rooted connection to their surrounding environment. When you couple this with an archaeological analysis from the region, it only reinforces a belief that the Cherokee people have inhabited this region for thousands of years while all the while developing and growing their culture.

Next, it was important to outline each of the theories surrounding the Bat Creek Stone. Equal weight of analysis and judgement was given to each theory including the Cherokee theory, the "Lost Tribes of Israel" theory, and the fraud theory. Each respective theory has its proponents and its nay-sayers. Each theory brings with it supporting evidence, while be it some theories of the Stone have more excepted evidence form the academic world. While the official tribal opinion is that the Bat Creek Stone inscription is not Cherokee syllabary, the tribe has left open the debate of the Bat Creek Stone. They have left the debate open regarding the Stone, not because the tribe believes in the possibility that it might be of Hebrew origins or that it is a fraud. No, the debate is left open, because there is a cultural belief in Cherokee that all opinions are valued, and despite disagreement on a certain issue or topic, it is the responsibility of proponents of each perspective to sway the other on their stance. There is no condemnation of opinion. The allowance of the openness of the debate and the sharing of all sides of the story around such an object is most definitely grounded in a cultural premise of to-hi, or balance, with all views. This approach is driven by humility for the thoughts and feelings of others.

In this respect, the Museum of the Cherokee Indian decided to take a risky approach by allowing opinions to be shared that are not popular much less supported in the world of academia, ultimately jeopardizing its institutional integrity. At the heart of such an approach, the tribe and the museum exercised its sovereign right, beholden to none, to tell a story related to its own history and culture the way it wanted to. The EBCI facilitated, negotiated, and drove the

entire process regarding the telling of this story. This was a process where the museum was empowered through the power of being able to dictate the way the story and ultimately the exhibit of such a controversial object would be laid out. A tribe excepting this responsibility and utilizing their resources to carry-out that end goal was in a way a form of decolonization as well. Decolonization is about empowerment. It is about transferring negative reactionary energy into a more positive rebuilding energy needed not only in our museums but in our tribal communities as a whole.[164]

The saga of the Bat Creek Stone wasn't all success for the Museum of the Cherokee Indian. The issue with the scientific testing was never resolved and it appears both the tribe and the Smithsonian are content with the stalemate to delay the testing. It is evident that while the tribe will not condemn the other opinions, it is confident in its stance that the inscription on the Stone is not of Cherokee origin. If the tribe did believe this or believe that the Stone itself could be ground breaking in proving or disproving certain beliefs, and they wanted to pursue that approach, they would be more aggressive in their dealings and negotiations regarding the further testing of the Bat Creek Stone. An interesting point to note here however is why if the Smithsonian's stance is the Stone is absolutely a fraud, why would they not be completely open to conducting testing, especially if the tests were non-evasive to the artifact? From this stance, there is nothing to hide so what is the risk of conducting the testing? Perhaps it is simply an adversarial academic approach fueled with bureaucratic obstacles aimed at deterring a tribe from telling its own story.

Regardless of these questions, it is evident that the Museum of the Cherokee Indian's approach to this whole process can serve as a model for all tribal museums. There have been numerous myths, beliefs, stories, and ultimately exhibits narrated by non-Indigenous entities for

centuries. Many objects have been discovered, documented, and displayed that ultimately seek to undermine the diversity and value of Indigenous culture. While many of these objects are surrounded by controversy or proven to be false all together, they still have fascinating stories to share. They still can be utilized by tribes to strengthen their knowledge of their own histories and creating a new avenue for tribal museums to narrate stories related to their culture in a truly cultural and Indigenous perspective. The Museum of the Cherokee Indian sought to embrace the controversy in telling the story of the Bat Creek Stone. They used the Stone to share a fascinating story with the community and the museum guests, while respecting all opinions and staying true to the value of Cherokee oral traditions and beliefs. The Bat Creek Model should serve as a case study for other tribes to tell stories that maybe are connected with their tribe that are controversial. This model serves as an example of exercising tribal sovereignty, best practices for tribal museums, and embracing different opinions while still valuing and standing by your own tribal beliefs.

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MUSEUM EXHIBITS

Museum of the Cherokee Indian: Bat Creek Stone